

MARXISM IN AN AGE OF CATASTROPHE

HOW CAPITALISM DESTROYED THE ENVIRONMENT AND CREATED THE VIRUS CRISIS >>PAGES 10&11

JOHNSON'S FAILURES ARE MORE THAN PERSONAL >>PAGE 6 NHS IS UNDERMINED >>PAGE 20

Socialist Worker

£1 | No 2701 | 22 - 28 April 2020 | socialistworker.co.uk

BAIL OUT WORKERS NOT FAT CATS



David Lewis

Tesco pockets £585 million in rates relief, then hands £900 million to shareholders



Sir Philip Green

Owens three yachts but demands state pays his 14,000 shop workers



Sir Richard Branson

Has £4 billion fortune but wants £500 million of our cash for his airline

NO MORE MONEY FOR THE BOSSES

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

BILLIONAIRES AND corporations are queuing for handouts from the government.

They aren't satisfied with the bailouts they already benefit from.

Virgin's Richard Branson is demanding a £500 million loan from the government and saying his operations could collapse.

Why not dip into his wealth of well over £4 billion?

Topshop boss Sir Philip Green, worth over £1.5 billion, has laid off 14,500 employees.

He has applied for 80 percent of their wages to be paid by the government.

He won't take a hit.

And the subsidy hasn't stopped him threatening to close 100 Arcadia stores—with all the job losses that will cause.

We know what happens when companies get handouts.

Supermarket Tesco, headed by CEO Dave Lewis, pocketed £585 million in emergency business rate relief from the



Health workers are a better priority

government. The firm, whose sales are soaring, then handed £900 million in dividends to shareholders.

Businesses shouldn't be the ones getting the bailout.

Tax dodgers, fat cat executives and obscenely wealthy shareholders should be paying out now, not grabbing more.

The cash is needed for the NHS, workers facing unemployment, those on Universal Credit, people putting their lives at risk to fight coronavirus and the low-paid.

Coronavirus has not abolished class differences, it has revealed their depth.

Now is the time to say—not a penny for the greedy, grasping bosses.



THE THINGS THEY SAY

'Collateral damage'

How the Tories are treating cops, according to Wiltshire Police Federation chair Mark Andrews

'Our government seem to think we are not worth looking after'

Andrews continues

'For the rich, a dilemma—quarantine with staff, or do their own chores'

A Wall Street Journal headline laments the problems of the wealthy

'There's no way you're at war if your PM isn't there. He didn't chair any meetings. He liked his country breaks. He didn't work weekends'

A Downing Street senior adviser on Boris Johnson's failings in handling the coronavirus crisis

'There was a real sense that he didn't do urgent crisis planning'

The adviser continued



Luxury self-isolation for the haves and the have-Yachts

ENTERTAINMENT mogul David Geffen was forced to delete a social media post boasting of isolating on a superyacht.

His talk of self-isolating on a £474 million superyacht made a few too many people angry.

But many other members of the super-rich community have defied travel restrictions to fly by private jet to "quarantine" on their luxury yachts.

Rupert Connor from Luxury Yacht Group LLC said a number of private yacht owners "have elected to isolate on their yachts".

"It is a very wonderful oasis from the madness that is enveloping the world," he explained. "Many of the larger yachts have supplies for long range cruising, their engineering systems can



DAVID GEFFEN'S yacht

support them for months at a time and most of the crew have medical training."

Other yacht brokers are offering charters.

Jonathan Beckett of luxury yacht broker Burgess said some people have booked seven-week charters "to see out the pandemic".

"They will be home schooling, but the children will also have cooking lessons

with the chef and spend time in the engine room with the engineers learning the more technical sides of yachting," he explained.

Some stressed the perils of being on a massive luxury boat. Rumble Romagnoli of Relevance, a luxury digital marketing firm, said it can be "quite claustrophobic".

"It's not that pleasurable," he claimed. Yet

yacht trading continues, as Connor described how some prospective buyers "have already started to sense an opportunity".

● **ON FISHER** Island, which Bloomberg has called the richest postcode in the US, everybody is getting antibody tests for coronavirus.

In the rest of South Florida, it's not so easy to get the test, which detects antibodies that have been produced as a result of exposure to Covid-19.

Island spokesperson Lisa Worley said it was "not our intent" to create an impression that some people would receive preferential treatment.

In 2015 the average income among Fisher Island residents was £2 million. Apartments sell for up to £32 million.

● **A TORY** councillor has been forced to deny baking a swastika into a hot cross bun and posting an image of it on Snapchat.

Former city lord mayor Lee Mason denies the allegation, although he admitted baking the words, "Sex," and, "Fuck" into some buns. The Tories have suspended Mason, a councillor in Portsmouth. Mason said, "I have not baked a bun with a Nazi symbol. I baked some cakes, yes, but I haven't done a Nazi symbol on any of them."

Nazi cross bun?

● **WALT DISNEY** will stop paying more than 100,000 employees from this week.

The Financial Times newspaper said this would save the firm up to £400 million a month. Disney made an operating income of over £1.1 billion in the last three months of 2019.

Greedy energy firms grab £1.7 billion in overpaid bills

AS MILLIONS of people struggle with money due to the coronavirus crisis, it's nice to know energy firms are doing their bit to help.

Some 1.4 million people have now applied for Universal Credit as bosses lay off staff or cut hours due to the crisis.

More and more people worry they can't afford to buy enough food or pay bills.

But energy firms have grabbed a whopping £1.7 billion from us in overpaid bills.

A survey last week found that nearly 13 million gas and energy customers are owed up to £200 each from

overpaid accounts.

The price comparison site uswitch.com discovered the scandal after carrying out a poll of 2,000 people.

People are paying too much in monthly direct debits compared to the energy they actually use.

The survey found that the total owed to gas and electricity customers was £230 million higher than last year—a rise of 13.5 percent.

The average credit due per household was £136.

Nearly half of those surveyed said they didn't know how to claim a refund.

Lab bosses 'surprise' at calls from Gilligan

THE TORIES have brought in former right wing "journalist" Andrew Gilligan to negotiate with private sector pathology labs.

He has no science or medical background and is now a transport adviser to the Tories.

One lab director said, "He was attempting to negotiate how we might donate key machines to the NHS testing regime and did not know we were already using our resources to carry out Covid-19 screening for NHS staff."

A lab executive told the Open Democracy website that he was surprised to receive a

Andrew Gilligan

call from Gilligan.

He said, "I thought to myself at the time, what the fuck is Andrew Gilligan doing making this request on behalf of Number 10?"

Row over cops' Taser targets

A NUMBER of groups have left the National Police Chiefs' Council's (NPCC) independent Taser advisory group in protest at the lack of action over disproportionate use of Tasers against black and Asian people.

Use of Tasers rose by 39 percent last year. Home Office figures show that black people in England and Wales are nearly eight times more likely to be targeted with them.

Liberty, Inquest, StopWatch and the Open Society, and policing expert Dr Mike Shiner all resigned from the taser advisory group last month.

They said a secret decision in February to absorb a planned assessment of the disproportionate use of guns against ethnic minorities showed concerns weren't being taken seriously.

In a joint resignation letter they wrote that the advisory group's "existence is relied on to legitimise current use of Taser".

They added that cops had not "treated the issues we have raised with the level of seriousness they warrant".

Shiner said the NPCC was using the group "for

Cop's Taser gun

decorative purposes, creating a false impression of consultation and engagement".

"Police powers are being increased without increases in scrutiny and accountability," he warned. "The rollout of Taser represents a significant escalation in the weaponisation of the police."

"There is a real danger that we're sleepwalking into military-style policing."

Last month the Home Office announced that police forces would get a further £6.7 million to buy over 8,000 new Tasers.

It follows £10 million of ringfenced funding handed over last September.

Some 18 people have died after being shot with a Taser, according to Amnesty International. Police used Tasers 22,059 times in 2018-19.

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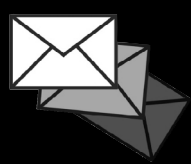
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Thousands forced back to work in unsafe conditions

by NICK CLARK

MORE THAN 5,000 people are being made to go into work to operate the government's payment scheme for laid off workers.

The scheme began operating on Monday of this week. It sees the government pay bosses 80 percent of wages for workers laid off during the coronavirus outbreak.

Yet thousands of people operating the scheme's phonelines are being made to go into work themselves.

Bosses at HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)—which runs the scheme—haven't put into place measures to allow call centre workers to work from home.

That means some 5,000 people are still going to work in HMRC offices every day. That's despite at least five HMRC call centre workers having already died of coronavirus.

On top of that, bosses want to draft in some 6,000 extra workers from other government departments or areas of HMRC to operate the phonelines.

At least some of them will have been working from home.

One HMRC worker and PCS union rep told Socialist Worker that since the outbreak, bosses had provided some IT equipment allowing people to work from home.

Kit

But, "Rather than give the kit to work at home to those call centre workers, they've given the kit to people who were already at home doing other areas of work."

The first coronavirus death of an HMRC call centre worker was reported at the end of March in an office in Salford. Since then, at least four others are also reported to have died of the virus.

Yet bosses have dragged their feet to provide equipment that allows

people to work from home. And HMRC workers report that conditions are still unsafe—with inadequate protective equipment, and no proper social distancing measures in place.

At the start of April, HMRC workers complained of having to sit too close together. And in at least one office, the only protective equipment workers were given were paper towels to hold while using door handles.

One PCS rep said, "The employer has given lots of assurances. We've now got hygiene stewards, which

is basically a cleaner in a yellow jacket cleaning door handles and lift buttons.

"But my understanding is it's still the case that there are issues with social distancing and a lack of hand sanitiser."

Workers in several other government departments fear their bosses want to force them back into their offices.

Bosses at the Passport Office had planned to send up to 2,000 workers back to carry out non-essential work.

They shelved the plans after opposition from the PCS.

And in the Department for Work and Pensions, several workers are also still waiting for equipment to work from home. The PCS rep said, "Health and safety laws say that if your workplace is unsafe, you have a right to refuse to work."

They added, "We should be campaigning to make sure everyone has the equipment they need to work from home—and against any attempt to force us back into the offices."

A CALL centre worker at Trinity Bridge House in Salford died after contracting coronavirus

Bias against BME workers

CAROL COOPER, head of equality, at Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust, has told the Nursing Times that black and Asian nurses and healthcare assistants felt they were being picked to work on coronavirus wards more than their white colleagues.

"BME staff feel that they are being put on Covid-19 wards and exposed to patients with Covid-19 over and above their colleagues," said Cooper.

"Some are saying they are being taken from the wards that they usually work on and put on the

Covid wards and they feel that there is a bias.

"The same bias that existed before they are feeling is now influencing their being appointed and they are terrified, everybody is terrified.

"There are multiple deprivations that people are subject to now. I think Covid is throwing a light on the cracks in society.

"We are going to have to rethink how we exist as a society, how we care for one another, how we care for the most vulnerable people in our society."

Key workers

Post strike in Suffolk over safety

POSTAL WORKERS in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, walked out briefly on Friday of last week over coronavirus health and safety fears.

Members of the CWU union at the Royal Mail delivery office said they were being made to work too close together.

Bosses had brought in a new work station after an increase in parcel deliveries during the lockdown. But workers said this put their safety at risk.

One worker said it was "scary" working under those conditions. "If you force people to stand right next to each other, shoulder to

Post workers are put at risk

shoulder, I'm not going to," he told the East Anglian Daily Times.

CWU regional secretary Paul Moffat said Royal Mail was "putting profit before people's safety".

"The problem is they are still running the business as a commercial business as opposed to a business with key workers in it," he said.

He added, "As a union we have said 'if you don't feel safe, don't work'."

The walkout lasted around an hour and a half, ending with an agreement between union officials and managers.

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IN THIS WEEK

1979

Police in London kill Blair Peach

SOCIALIST teacher Blair Peach died after cops attacked an anti-Nazi protest in Southall on 23 April 1979.

Blair joined the protest against the National Front. None of the six cops involved in his death have been charged.



Bus drivers scared and angry over dangerous conditions

by SARAH BATES

BUS WORKERS are speaking out about their “fear and anger” as transport bosses move too slowly to protect their safety.

London bus driver Trevor said, “It’s a life and death situation here. Not everyone’s immune system is going to be able to hack it—some will come out of it and some won’t.”

With at least 15 bus drivers in the capital dying after testing positive for Covid-19, workers live in fear every day of catching it, or passing it on.

“There are a lot of drivers who live with and look after their elderly parents—they’re really worried they’re going out to work, catching the virus, going home and infecting other people,” said Trevor.

He told Socialist Worker he knew some drivers were living in their garden sheds to avoid passing on infection to their family members.

“They have their food dropped off there—but they have to go into the house to take a shower. But they’re more worried about their wives and kids.”

Transport for London (TfL) said that all buses in the capital would have the front doors sealed off from Monday of this week. Passengers will board from the middle or back doors.

But TfL bosses have been reluctant to rollout the changes as it will make travel free.

“It feels like we’re sleep-walking into the slaughterhouse—a lot of people are scared,” driver Jeff told Socialist Worker.

“It’s all about the companies making a profit, and that comes before our health. There are a lot of games being played and it comes at the cost of drivers’ lives.

“They’re not taking it seriously because it’s going to cost them money—but one bus driver’s life is priceless, any human being’s life is.”

Trade unionists gathered near Holloway bus garage in Islington, north London, on Thursday last week to demand protective clothing for all drivers.

Richard, a driver at the garage, told Socialist Worker that workers supported the action but felt they couldn’t be part of it.

“People wanted to be involved but management and the union are against something happening at the garage,” he said.

“Workers are scared to talk, but drivers that were told about it were pleased.

“They wanted to go out there and talk but you’ve got one of the directors out there, and management too—they’re standing there watching.”

Trevor called on TfL to implement random inspections on garages to ensure that company bosses are complying with safety regulations.

“If companies don’t follow through, they should penalise them,” he said.

Many workers are furious that the Tory government was slow to act over mass testing, social distancing measures and providing PPE.

“Boris Johnson is directly responsible and should be held accountable for these deaths,” said Jeff. “He chose to carry on as though nothing was happening.”

Richard said changes across the network are coming too slowly.

“At this point, I don’t understand why Unite are so close to Transport for London,” he said.

“They need to be standing up more to management and demanding—

not negotiating—more safety for the workers.”

Unions have been slow to make demands—they need to say loud and clear to bosses that workers won’t work without protective kit.

Workers’ names have been changed



TRADE UNIONISTS outside Holloway bus garage in north London

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

Safety gone ‘out the window’ at big distribution firm, says worker

BOSSSES AT distribution companies are “endangering thousands” of workers with “inadequate safety measures,” according to unions.

One worker at delivery firm Yodel told Socialist Worker that bosses there still haven’t brought in social distancing measures or proper protective kit.

One warehouse worker in London told Socialist Worker, “Between midnight and 6am there’s about ten people in a very large warehouse and relatively speaking we’re well spread out.

Distancing

“But between 6am and 9am the drivers come to load up—and at that point social distancing goes out the window.

“You’re working right near where they are working—there’s no two metres at this point.”

The worker explained that some drivers had bought their own masks, but that warehouse workers were still exposed. “We

haven’t had any face masks provided by the company,” he said.

“We have industrial gloves to lift all the boxes, but there’s nothing stopping them from giving us surgical gloves to wear underneath.”

The worker worries that Yodel could be a “super spreader” if they don’t bring in new safety measures.

He explained, “One of Yodel’s depots has a delivery zone that stretches from Pentonville Road in central London to Saffron Walden in Essex.

“The person who placed the order doesn’t have to sign for it on a PDA scanner any more, but there are still concerns.

“With all the cafes and shops closed, there’s nowhere for drivers to go to the toilet or wash their hands on the way.”

Yodel isn’t the only company in the sector that’s putting workers’ lives and health at risk during the coronavirus crisis.

Five unions have accused logistics giant DHL of “showing

utter disdain for its workforce”.

A statement last week by the GMB, Unite, Usdaw, RMT and URTU unions said DHL is “disregarding the urgent concerns of its staff over a lack of PPE and a failure to carry out safety and social distancing measures”.

DHL, which has 41,000 workers across Britain, has also “refused to grant full company sick pay to symptomatic workers who need to self-isolate”.

Billions

The statement added, “A company that is worth tens of billions should also be topping up the wages of those staff who have been furloughed instead of simply taking advantage of the government’s job retention scheme.

“DHL’s inadequate response to the pandemic is endangering thousands.”

Unions need to organise walkouts to force distribution bosses to put people before profit.

Uber driver suffered in silence, fearing eviction

AN UBER driver died from coronavirus after trying to hide his illness for fear of being evicted.

Rajesh Jayaseelan died alone in Northwick Park hospital in Harrow, London, earlier this month.

His friend Sunil Kumar said Rajesh had “starved” for days in his rented lodgings beforehand.

He had told his wife on the phone that he didn’t want to leave his room for fear other residents might realise he had Covid-19 and he would be thrown out.

Sunil said a previous landlord had ordered Rajesh to leave because he feared that, as a minicab driver, Rajesh would spread the virus.

Rajesh is the third Uber driver confirmed to have died from coronavirus in London, although several more have been reported.

Yaseen Aslam, general secretary of the United Private Hire Drivers’ Association, said there have been

“at least six deaths of minicab drivers and countless numbers ill”.

“The migrant workers in particular are vulnerable because they feel forced to work because they are not entitled to government benefits,” he added.

Last month Uber said it would compensate drivers with up to £100 a week for up to 14 days if they were diagnosed with the virus or were

self-isolating. That is not enough for people to get by on.

Kumar said Rajesh “told his wife he wished he had someone that could look after him even for a week and give him some food and take care of him”.

As his condition got worse, he refused to call an ambulance because he didn’t want to draw attention to his illness.

He died on 11 April.

Rajesh Jayaseelan

Unsafe working conditions in warehouse a crying shame

WORKERS AT a clothes warehouse in Burnley are being made to work without protective equipment—while having to produce useless fashion facemasks.

Online clothes shop Boohoo was slammed for selling face coverings bearing coronavirus-related slogans for £5 each.

One says “If you can read this you’re too close” while another states “Eat, sleep, isolate, repeat.”

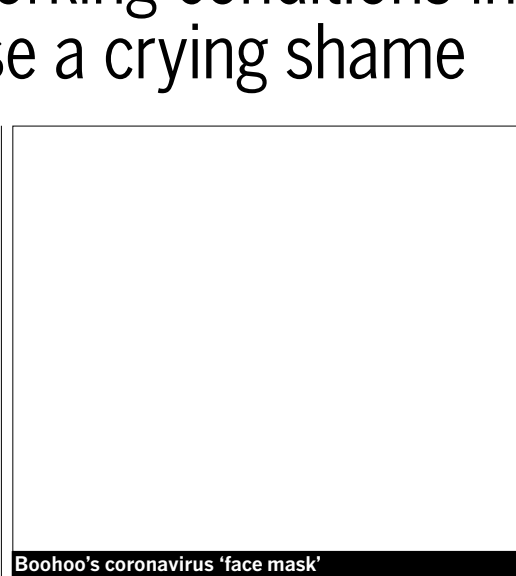
Boohoo’s website says the masks “should not be used as personal protection equipment”.

One nurse said Bohoo was “using their greed to make a mockery of people on the frontline”.

She added that the company should instead help to

provide actual PPE. Meanwhile, workers at Boohoo’s own warehouse have repeatedly complained that they lack protective equipment.

The workers’ Usdaw union said it had been “inundated with serious concerns” from “terrified” workers at the warehouse. Workers



Boohoo’s coronavirus ‘face mask’

Socialist Worker
WHAT WE THINK

INACTION MAKES UNION LEADERS COMPLICIT

THE FAILURES of most trade union leaders to mount any resistance to the Tory government’s fatal handling of coronavirus intensifies the danger to workers.

It’s a welcome step that unions are calling for a minute’s silence on 28 April to remember workers who have died due to coronavirus.

The silence, due to take place on Workers’ Memorial Day, is an opportunity for trade unionists to organise action in their own workplaces (see page 20).

In particular workers should take up anti-Tory slogans demanding mass supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) and implementation of social distancing in workplaces.

But trade unions urgently need to do more. They should start organising real resistance to protect their members.

That means stopping work—walking out—when it’s unsafe.

Unions need to encourage action by those herded into unsafe workplaces because of government lies and bosses’ hunger for profit.

But instead too often they tell workers to put up with conditions

that put them and their families at risk. To take one example, some Union union officials have issued wholly rotten guidance to members terrified about a lack of PPE in care homes.

An email seen by Socialist Worker advised that workers could be disciplined if they refused to carry out parts of their job.

And it also said that workers should fill out a series of written risk assessments and escalate concerns up the management chain.

This process could take weeks or months to resolve—while putting workers at risk daily.

Workers should be encouraged by their unions to immediately walk out if their lives are

“It’s not union general secretaries who are forced to drive a London bus

threatened. Union general secretary Dave Prentis called on people to “remember the sacrifice” that workers have made.

But they have died because the government gutted the NHS, privatised social care, ignored the threat of Covid-19 and failed to implement mass testing.

It’s not the case that workers decided to undertake a noble sacrifice—they are being slaughtered while delivering critical care.

It’s not the Tory cabinet who are forced to work in care homes without protection.

And it’s not union general secretaries who are forced to drive a London bus too small to observe social distancing measures.

The Labour Party has also been more concerned to back the government than encourage resistance. Labour leader Keir Starmer called for the government to “set out a road map to lift restrictions in certain sectors of the economy”.

Workers need more than tributes when they are dead—they need a fight to keep them alive.

There can be no more waiting. Union leaders have to be pushed to organise effective resistance.

NO TORIES ON OUR SIDE

TORY DISAGREEMENTS over ending the lockdown reflect splits in the ruling class about how to return to “business as usual”.

The mainstream press says Boris Johnson and health secretary Matt Hancock are “doves” who want to “save lives and protect the NHS” with a longer lockdown.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak and Michael Gove are “hawks” who want to get profits flowing again. Johnson and Hancock couldn’t care less about ordinary people’s

lives or the NHS. They were willing to sacrifice 250,000 lives in their plan for “herd immunity”.

Their lies—over PPE, mass testing and health and social care services—mean more than 16,000 have now died.

The Tories dragged their feet over a lockdown. They hoped to gain financial advantage as Britain stayed open for business and competitors shut.

Sections of the ruling class now fear that ending the lockdown would risk political revenge from

millions of people as it unleashes a “second wave” of infections.

But British capitalism’s rivals are reopening their economies—and Sunak fears that Britain’s bosses will fall behind.

That’s a price no Tory minister or boss wants to pay.

The Tories will be united when they decide the best way to save their system.

Workers will have to fight to put lives before profit—and for no return to toxic “normal” after the crisis.

Breakfast in



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ANALYSIS

ALEX CALLINICOS



Will US hegemony survive pandemic?

DONALD TRUMP'S decision to withdraw United States funding for the World Health Organisation symbolises how the coronavirus pandemic has been dominated by national responses to what is a global problem.

The US isn't alone in this. The European Union has, quite typically, reacted in a shambolic, internally divided, and self-obsessed way.

But other capitalist states have traditionally relied on US leadership to manage international crises.

As recently as the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-9, the administrations of George W Bush and Barack Obama did offer this leadership. But Trump has no interest in playing this role, and no other state is capable of replacing the US.

This includes China—the US's only serious rival. The pandemic has had a contradictory effect on China's global standing. On one hand, the slow initial response of local authorities in the province of Hubei, where Covid-19 originated, and their attempts to impose a cover-up were very damaging.

On the other, the central government's belated but determined imposition of a lockdown backed up by tracing and testing got the pandemic under control. We don't know how much Beijing was involved in the cover-up, but its overall handling of the crisis compares favourably with the callous bungling of Trump and Boris Johnson.

The official Chinese propaganda machine is busy playing up this contrast. Meanwhile, China has been exporting medical supplies worldwide, thereby demonstrating what a good global citizen it is. This has helped to provoke the Trump administration and its allies, such as the British and Australian governments, into a blame game, demanding an official inquiry into the origins of the pandemic.

Will historians in retrospect argue that Covid-19 was the moment when China began to displace the US as the hegemonic capitalist state? I don't think so.

Dollar

The two foundations of US hegemony are the dollar and the Pentagon. In the present context it's the dollar that matters.

The US remains the centre of the global financial system. Its huge banks dominate the global financial markets, which are driven by borrowing in dollars. It is this that makes sanctions such an effective weapon in the US's toolkit, since they deny targeted states and their businesses access to credit.

And this credit is mainly in dollars. Both the global financial crisis and the panic provoked by the pandemic were characterised by a flight to dollars. Firms and states hung on to the dollars they need to purchase imports and repay debt. And they sold assets—even ultra-secure US Treasury bonds—in order to get hold of more dollars.

And in both crises the US state—in the shape of the central bank, the Federal Reserve and the Treasury—stepped in to provide these dollars. In March the Fed extended the swap lines it had provided for five major central banks, allowing them to exchange their own currencies for dollars, to another nine central banks.

But the People's Bank of China didn't ask for, and wasn't offered a swap line. This isn't because China doesn't need dollars. The Chinese government reacted to the global financial crisis by ordering the state-owned banks to increase lending hugely. The result was massive over-investment and a property bubble that left big state-owned enterprises and local governments loaded with debt.

Beijing has been trying gradually to squeeze the bad debt out. This is one reason why it has reacted to the pandemic with a much more modest fiscal stimulus than some Western governments.

But this debt is in dollars as well as renminbi (or yuan). According to the South China Morning Post, "Chinese companies have been borrowing US dollar debt for their overseas expansion as well as bringing proceeds back to China to convert into yuan for domestic purposes."

In 2021 £88.5 billion of US dollar debt falls due.

So, despite Trump, the US financial apparatus is still in charge globally. But this isn't a stable situation.

As the Beijing-based economist Michael Pettis puts it, "As the US share of the world economy contracts, it will become increasingly difficult for the US to carry the exorbitant burden of central banking to the world."

THE PRIME minister prefers lazy weekends at his Chequers home to dealing with the coronavirus crisis

Crisis is about more than Johnson's incompetence

by CHARLIE KIMBER

THE TORIES are under increasing pressure as criticism widens of their criminally chaotic mis-management of the coronavirus pandemic.

An article in the Sunday Times newspaper forensically details the failure of Boris Johnson's government to prepare for the pandemic.

It accuses Johnson of missing five of the government's key Cobra planning meetings as the Covid-19 crisis gathered pace. The article quotes a senior adviser to Downing Street saying "There's no way you're at war if your PM isn't there. And what you learn about Boris was he didn't chair any meetings. He liked his country breaks. He didn't work weekends."

"There was a real sense that he didn't do urgent crisis planning. It was exactly like people feared he would be."

The article also claims that years of cutbacks and preparations for a no-deal Brexit "sucked all the blood out of pandemic planning".

Officials told the newspaper, "Emergency stockpiles had severely dwindled and gone out of date after becoming a low priority in the years of austerity cuts."

Shortages of crucial personal protective equipment (PPE) could still have been avoided.

The British Healthcare Trades Association was ready to help supply PPE in February, but its offer of help was only accepted on 1 April.

A senior department of health insider told the Sunday Times, "I remember being called into some of the meetings about this in February and thinking, 'Well, it's a good thing this isn't the big one.' We were doomed by our incompetence, our hubris and our austerity."

There are many other serious charges against Johnson

Johnson 'doesn't do' crises

Speech shows Tory rot

IF THE only problem was the laziness and ineptness of Johnson himself then replacing him with someone more efficient would be sufficient to handle the crisis.

Perhaps a more diligent Tory or that serious-looking Sir Keir Starmer will be enough.

But the rot goes much deeper. In a speech in Greenwich on 3 February (which the Sunday Times doesn't mention) Johnson was arrogantly proclaiming a new era of British strength.

"We have the opportunity, we have the

newly recaptured powers, we know where we want to go, and that is out into the world," he said.

Key to this post-Brexit vision was that, "We are re-emerging after decades of hibernation as a campaigner for global free trade."

"And frankly it is not a moment too soon because the argument for this fundamental liberty is now not being made."

At the time the speech was reported as directed against the European Union.

But its implications were far more important than that.

and the article is utterly damning of Tory rule.

But it's important to ask not just how they failed but why.

For the Tories corporations and capital flow must come before everything. Britain would reject the measures actually necessary to combat the pandemic because they seemed an obstacle to business.

This is also the background to the "herd immunity" strategy.

The Sunday Times headlined its article "38 days when Britain sleepwalked into disaster". It didn't sleepwalk—it leapt into its policy with eyes wide open.

It was utterly reckless and fatal for thousands of people whose lives could have been saved.

But the crucial thing is to recognise that it was political, an entirely consistent continuation of capitalist policies that put profit first and ordinary people last.

The revelations underline why we shouldn't trust the government's current measures or its plans for when restrictions should be lifted.

Johnson, and acolytes such as health secretary Matthew Hancock, have blood on their hands. They should go.

But what's most important is not just revealing Johnson's failings, but crushing the capitalist priorities that lie behind them.

Tories' lies hide scale of deaths in care homes

Thousands of care home residents are thought to have died due to coronavirus, writes **Sarah Bates**

AT LEAST 4,000 people have died of coronavirus in care homes, according to an industry body.

Figures from the National Care Forum, which represents not-for-profit social care providers, show 4,040 people in residential and nursing homes may have died up to 13 April.

It added that the total death toll of residents is likely to be over 7,300—once those who were moved to hospital are included.

The scale of the crisis in social care remains a guessing game because of the Tories' refusal to collect and publicise accurate information about Covid-19 deaths outside hospitals.

The Office for National Statistics had recorded 1,043 deaths in care homes, as Socialist Worker went to press on Tuesday.

But the real figure will be much higher.

Leaving

The situation is leaving workers and service users across social care fearing for their future.

Katie works for a charity providing supported-living accommodation in Glasgow. "There's an air of anxiety among the staff and the supported people," she told Socialist Worker.

"We don't really know what's going on and what's going to happen."

Katie said that workers had only been given personal protective equipment (PPE) to use with one resident who was deemed high-risk.

And she says there is a lack of guidance in how to deal with the crisis in the facility.

"We're getting emails from the company that are a bit patronising," Katie explained.

"It's saying we're doing a really good job and it's proud of us, but we're not being given any information about what kind of equipment to use."

It's not just adults in social care who are suffering.

One healthcare worker in London

BACK STORY

Tory policy means the number of coronavirus deaths in care homes is a guessing game

● At least 4,000 people have died of Covid-19 in care and nursing homes up to 13 April

● An industry body says that the total death toll of residents is likely to be more than 7,000 if it includes those moved to hospitals

● But as official figures only include deaths in hospitals, the real figure remains unknown

told Socialist Worker that vulnerable children were being "overlooked" and that it's likely "care services will start to break down".

She said that care workers don't have access to the necessary PPE, and, as a result, families are too scared to let them into their homes to provide care.

"Families aren't letting them in the door because they're worried about the PPE and don't want to bring in infection," she said.

"Carers will become sick or not want to enter homes to protect their own families."

For children with chronic health conditions, it's a very scary situation.

Workers are trying to discharge very ill children from hospitals into hospices to minimise the risk of them contracting Covid-19.

But PPE stocks were so low that hospice workers relied on volunteers to sew them medical scrub-like uniforms as a replacement.

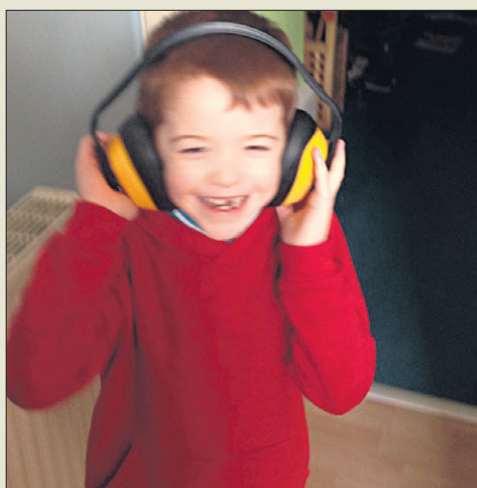
The treatment of adults and children within social care services is a national scandal. The services should be properly funded, publicly-run and workers kept safe to provide the care people need.

Katie is a pseudonym



On other pages...

Building bosses put lives at risk
>>Page 18



COPS TOLD Kiki, who is disabled, she couldn't sit down on a bench (top). She was with her son (left) who has autism and has been unsettled by the change in routine that coronavirus has brought about

Scottish cops forced to apologise for telling disabled woman to stop sitting

by **SADIE ROBINSON**

POLICE IN Scotland have been forced to apologise after an officer told a disabled woman she couldn't sit on a park bench.

Kiki was in Queen's Park in Glasgow with her son, who has autism, earlier this month.

"We've been going to the park every day partly to create a new routine for him," Kiki told Socialist Worker.

"He has been unsettled because his routine has been disrupted."

"And he needs daily exercise, otherwise he will be hyper. But because I have mobility problems, the only way I can take him is if I can sit down."

Kiki said the benches in the park aren't taped up and that there is "no indication" that they shouldn't be used. "On this particular day the police shouted to me that I can't sit down and we have to move," she said.

"I explained that I had a disability. He could see I had a

walking stick and a child with me.

"He said it doesn't matter, it's the same for everybody. But it's not the same for everybody because not everybody needs to sit down."

"I took it as basically saying disabled people can't enter the park."

Guidelines in Scotland say that people should observe social distancing when out of their homes.

Guidelines

But police later told Kiki that the officer was wrong to say she could not sit on a bench. "I've seen the guidelines," she said.

"And how some officers are interpreting them is way over the top."

"I put a complaint in with Police Scotland and heard back the next day. The officer I spoke to apologised for the behaviour of the officer."

Kiki said the problem is that many people don't know what they are allowed to do. And for

people with disabilities or other additional needs, this can cause stress.

"There are people sitting in their homes who are blind who think they can't go out at all," she said. "Adults who have additional needs such as autism or ADHD aren't fully understanding the guidelines."

"Many feel quite fearful of going out. A lot of people live on their own and are not getting support."

Kiki said the government needs to be much clearer about what people's rights are—and take disabled people into account. She is the second disabled woman to complain about police behaviour in Queen's Park. Lauren, who suffers from Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, said officers asked her to leave the park after she stopped for a rest on a bench.

Kiki said, "If anyone has a similar experience, I would encourage them to take the officer's registration number and name, and make a complaint."



ROUND-UP

Israeli attacks hits Palestinians

ISRAEL BEGAN relaxing lockdown measures last Sunday—while clamping down on Palestinian efforts to deal with the coronavirus.

The Israeli government allowed some shops to open, and said 30 percent of the workforce could go back to work. It came as Israeli business owners protested against loss of income due to the lockdown measures, blocking roads and setting fire to tyres.

One protester complained they had voted for Binyamin Netanyahu as prime minister because he can “manage wars”—attack Palestinians and other Arabs and threaten Iranians. But he had failed “the coronavirus war”.

Thousands of people also rallied in capital Tel Aviv to protest over lockdown measures against Israeli people.

Police allowed the protest to go ahead. Meanwhile there were no Israeli protests against the repression of Palestinians under lockdown.

Israeli police shut down a coronavirus testing centre in occupied East Jerusalem on Tuesday of last week because it was linked to the Palestinian Authority.

The Silwan neighbourhood—where the testing centre was shut down—contains around half of all known coronavirus cases in East Jerusalem.

And hospitals in East Jerusalem complain of severe shortages.

Cape Town fight for food

HUNDREDS OF angry people fought running battles with the South African police in Mitchell's Plain near Cape Town last week.

They hurled rocks and set up street barricades with burning tyres.

Police fired rubber bullets and teargas to stop the protests.

“We must stay at home because of the virus, but where must we get food from?” local resident Rosie Matthews told GroundUp website.

Another resident said, “People are hungry. They have no supplies left in their houses, they cannot work, they cannot go to borrow food, they cannot live.

“And then the police come and arrest them.”

In Gatesville in Cape Town itself, people stormed a supermarket and took five cash registers and groceries.

Protests also took place in Alexandra township in Johannesburg.

Across many parts of Africa harsh lockdowns are being imposed on people who have no reserves of food and there is no adequate planning to feed them.

Trump piles on pressure to end the US lockdown

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump is ramping up attempts to force people back to work even as coronavirus sweeps the country and deaths mount.

Trump wants large sections of businesses to reopen by 1 May—whatever the cost in human lives. Across the US thousands of people are dying, with many other deaths still unrecorded.

Police discovered 17 corpses piled up in a New Jersey nursing home last week. The corpses had been stacked in a small morgue designed to hold a maximum of four bodies.

Yet Trump is pressuring state governors to back him.

On Friday of last week he posted a series of tweets effectively promoting small far right groups that were demonstrating in state capitals against mainly Democratic governors to demand the immediate lifting of lockdowns.

Most of the anti-lockdown protesters wore pro-Trump material. Some carried assault rifles. Some displayed Nazi insignia and carried Confederate flags.

A report from Michigan by the Marx21 socialist group said, “Perhaps more significantly, the protest had powerful backers in the pro-Trump wing of the Republican Party.

“The Freedom Fund, one of the groups behind the action, was founded by an adviser to the family of billionaire Education Secretary Betsy DeVos.”

Now the governors for Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana and Kentucky have formed a partnership to work together on restarting the

THOUSANDS OF protesters in Michigan demanded an end to the lockdown

economies in their states, which collectively account for about 16 percent of total US economic output.

Reported

Currently over 41,000 people in the US are reported to have died of the virus.

Yet Trump refuses to be held accountable.

A reporter from the television broadcaster CBS, Weijia Jiang, asked Trump to explain why people weren't warned quickly enough.

Trump replied by asking her to “keep her voice down”.

Vice president Mike Pence indicated that, due to a proposed roll out of testing for the virus, the US will be able to soon return to business as usual.

Experts have cast doubt on this and have estimated that 20 to 30 million people per day will need to be tested in order for the US to go back to work.

Trump's reckless plans will be contested.

Strikes are continuing to break

out in several areas.

Last week Chicago fast food workers from over 50 restaurants walked out to protest unsafe working conditions, after a McDonald's employee tested positive.

The battle is also beginning over who will pay for the crisis.

New York City mayor Bill de Blasio last week proposed a budget with around £650 million in education cuts.

Unions said the cuts were unacceptable and pledged to fight them.

FRANCE

Protests erupt in Paris against violent, racist cops

ANGER AGAINST racist and violent French police exploded in Paris last Sunday.

The trigger was an unmarked police car critically injuring a young man from an Arab background.

An eyewitness said police deliberately opened a door to strike the man's motorbike.

“The police were waiting for him at the red light,” he said. “By the time he got to the car to pass on the side, they opened the door suddenly.

“It was done on purpose, it was intended.”

Hundreds of people came on to the streets in protest.

They threw stones and

fireworks at the police.

“Since the start of the lockdown the cops have harassed Arabs and Muslims,” one protester told local media.

“They use every chance to arrest us and beat us.”

Protests then spread to other areas of Paris and other cities.

Videos of Sunday's clashes were posted to Twitter by journalist Taha Bouhafs—followed by a clip showing him being arrested by police.

Bouhafs said police threatened to throw a stun grenade at him and then fined him for not complying with the lockdown.

Last week prosecutors in Beziers, in the south of France, announced that officers were facing criminal charges after a man died while under arrest for breaching the lockdown.

Three officers were filmed dragging Mohamed Gabsi along the ground during a curfew.

Gabsi had suffered a heart attack by the time he arrived at a local police station and witnesses claim to have seen two officers sitting on top of him in their patrol car.

A spokesperson for France's Human Rights League described his death as a “scandal that shows how the poor are being killed”.

Anger is boiling over

Who's to blame for the crisis?

THE TORIES are trying to deflect blame for the coronavirus crisis by encouraging us to blame each other.

It started with talk of "panic buying" which was overstated. For example, research showed that only 3 percent of those buying pasta, "have taken home extraordinary quantities".

The attention to "poor behaviour" then moved on to public spaces.

So Brockwell Park in London gets closed because 3,000 people went there during the course of the whole day last Saturday.

But on any normal weekend there are some 10,000 visitors a day.

For people in cramped conditions with no outdoor space there is a simple solution. It is to open the 46,000 acres of golf courses and huge playing fields of private schools to the public.

Those really putting us at risk are those sending people to work without PPE.

Anna Gluckstein
North London

● IN TIMES of crisis it's good that some things remain constant, such as privileged Tory politicians who have never had to wear PPE in their lives lecturing NHS staff on when they need it.

The Tories have spent years attacking workers' safety. Their lack of preparation for a pandemic is illustrated by their lack of testing and supplies. Hence they deploy any excuse for their failure, however patronising or offensive.

John Murphy
Stockport

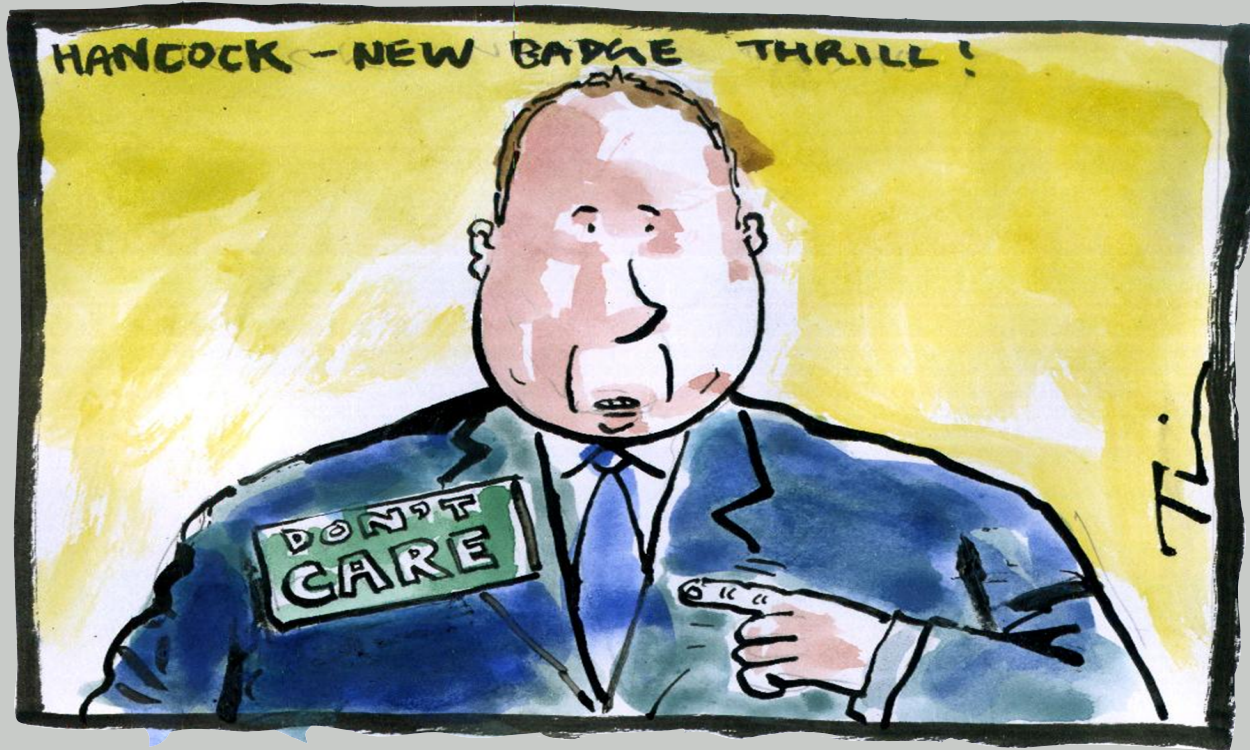


ILLUSTRATION: TIM SANDERS

'Radical' left in Spain failed the test of the coronavirus

I WAS angry to see the Spanish state relax its coronavirus lockdown last week and workers in manufacturing and construction being told to return to work.

The decision is the result of pressure from big company bosses in the IBEX 35 group.

That the government in Madrid is a coalition of the moderate left PSOE party, and the seemingly more radical Podemos party, made it doubly hard to take.

The government was slow to react to Covid-19 when it was ravaging in China, South Korea and Italy. Even after many cases were reported in Madrid and Vitoria, a city in the Basque Country, experts advised only local lockdowns were needed—and the coalition agreed.

It took more than a month for

Spain to announce a nationwide curfew.

And, because the main cities were not quarantined early, people with a second home or with family on the coast or countryside fled there, so spreading the virus.

When the central government tried to take control of health policy, which for more than 20 years has been managed by regional governments, it made terrible mistakes, including buying millions of faulty virus test kits from China.

It is true that some regional governments reacted far better, including those run by a coalitions of the left. In Valencia, for example, the authorities ordered tens of thousands of pieces of PPE protective equipment direct from China, and the tenth plane

shipment has just arrived.

But the local state cannot implement policies that could have really helped the poor during the lockdown and the mass unemployment that followed.

That was the job of the "left wing" central government.

Despite huge pressure from social media, the coalition has refused to pass a law to guarantee a universal basic income.

Some say ministers could not agree on the amount it should be set at.

The coronavirus was a test for the left in the Spanish state, and it has failed.

The masses certainly expected much more of a left coalition of which Podemos is a key part.

Rafel Sanchis
East London

Just a thought...

You can stick your medal

THE DAILY Mirror wants us to have medals, while health secretary Matt Hancock thinks an NHS equivalent of a Blue Peter badge will do.

But nurses don't need or want medals for doing our jobs. We want to be safe with the appropriate PPE and number of staff.

Pay is also important. We know that health workers, from junior doctors to cleaners, podiatrists to porters, do important jobs—which are all poorly paid.

Nurses wages have fallen 17 percent since 2009. If Boris Johnson is so "grateful" the least he can do give us all a decent rise.

Janet
Central London

I'm working but petrified

SOCIALIST Worker is right to flag up the dangers that people still working face (Socialist Worker, 8 April).

I'm a supermarket delivery driver, and the job is busier than ever.

Even though my employers have been good about changing rules to protect us, there are still big risks.

I feel nervous about doing the job because I don't know how I'd cope if I caught it. I have serious mental health issues and my husband is my support network—without him I wouldn't be able to cope.

But he has something wrong with his immune system. I'm petrified that if I caught it, I could give it to him.

Name withheld
by Email

No Starmer, reopening schools is not the key

HOW DISAPPOINTING to hear new Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer arguing that schools should be one of the first workplaces reopened when the lockdown is relaxed.

Let's think about the situation we are in.

Hospitals are still being overwhelmed by the huge influx of coronavirus patients, many of whom quickly become critically ill.

Frontline health workers are still not given adequate PPE, are not tested and are dying. Elderly people are

exposed to the virus in care homes and left to die unrecorded and their care workers ignored.

The idea of re-starting schools in this situation is outrageous.

It is asking for a huge upsurge in cases.

By stoking talk of ending the lockdown Starmer is backing the Tories and big business. He is looking out for their interests when he should be looking out for ours.

Amanda Squires
East London

Crocodile tears for BME health workers

THE HUGE number of BME health and care workers who have died from the coronavirus breaks my heart.

But the crocodile tears coming from the Tories and the media are making me feel sick.

Tory politicians, and the newspapers that support them, have spun endless stories saying that migrants were overrunning the NHS and had to be stopped.

They said we were responsible for the mess that they created with years of cuts. Yet now



we're supposed to believe them when they tell us how much they love us for the hard and dangerous work we are doing—bullshit!

Samira
Liverpool

● I AGREED with a lot of the article about why black and Asian people are more likely to get sick with the virus (Socialist Worker, 15 April).

But I'm not sure you're right about diabetes and genes.

Isn't it true that people from high status groups in India are more likely to get that disease than similar status Europeans?

If that really is the case, doesn't it mean a genetic factor is involved, and that it can be passed on?

Dinesh Kumar
Bangalore, India

Prison danger is life sentence

AS I write some 13 prisoners have died after contracting the coronavirus in jail.

Hundreds more have symptoms and are in extreme danger.

The health regime in British jails is horrendous and often outsourced to the private sector. That's putting prisoners with health issues in even more danger.

How is it that someone who has been convicted of a relatively minor crime can be handed what is a potential death sentence?

Anonymous
By Email

THE MONSTER that's stepped through our door could not be more familiar—we've known about it for more than 20 years. On paper at least, virtually every year, world leaders are warned by the scientific community that there is an imminent threat of pandemic.

It was also pointed out that the private pharmaceutical sector would be unable to supply the anti-virals and the vaccines that would be needed.

Capitalism poses a mortal threat to human survival in three ways.

First of all, it no longer creates jobs. It's made a billion people or more totally surplus to the needs of globalised production.

The majority of people in urban Africa and urban Latin America work in the informal sector, and that's basically the only sector in which jobs are created.

Second is climate change. Capitalism has propelled us to an entirely new geological epic, and climate change has enormous consequences for disease.

For instance, with global warming, the key insects of disease for malaria, dengue fever and so on are moving northward. You'll see the reappearance of malaria for example in Europe, which is almost inevitable.

And thirdly, capitalism threatens our survival because it directly unleashes, and directly produces, the kind of pandemics that we're in the middle of now.

This isn't just a single pandemic—we live in an age of pandemics and emerging diseases. Capitalist globalisation has produced these new plagues.

Capitalism has destroyed the natural and social boundaries between humans and wild animals populations that formerly have been very separated.

Logging

Coronaviruses are mainly found in bats. Bats are incredibly reclusive—it takes a lot to bring humans into contact with bats, or animals infected by them. The driving force of that has been the destruction of tropical forests by multinational logging companies, for instance clearance on a huge scale of the Amazon.

Then there's factory farming, and the industrialisation of production of poultry and livestock.

You'll find chicken plants that process a million chickens a year. These are like particle accelerators for viral diseases. You could not design a machine that is more efficient at breeding new hybrids of viruses and distributing them.

And the most important factor of all is that, in an immunological sense, there are two humanities. One humanity is well-fed, is generally in good health and has access to medicine.

There's a second humanity, which depends on medical systems that were in large part destroyed in the 1980s and 1990s.

The systems were destroyed by debt, structural adjustment and the International Monetary Fund's demand that countries reduce public sending or privatise public services.

All through sub-Saharan Africa and in other countries as well, sanitation is the single biggest source of vulnerability to infectious disease. People don't have access to clean water and can't wash their hands with soap every hour.

Right now we stand at the edge of what could be the real massacre of this pandemic as it explodes in the slums of the Global South. It's impossible to imagine this as something like an asteroid coming and hitting the Earth—this is a manufactured pandemic. In the past capitalism,

particularly global capitalism, depended on a modicum of investment in disease detection and early warning systems.

This was to safeguard trade and safeguard people's health in the northern colonialist countries.

A whole series of international sanitary conferences emerged out of late Victorian imperialism. Their explicit aim was to control infectious diseases in order. Similarly the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1948 was founded by the Rockefeller Foundation, which played an essential role in the 1940s and 1950s. Its concern originally was to safeguard the health of the plantation workers on the United Fruit Company plantations and in Chilean nitrate mines. It wanted to eliminate the disease itself using vaccinations. This proved to be incredibly success-

'This isn't just a single pandemic—we live in an age of pandemics and emerging diseases. Capitalist globalisation has produced these new plagues. It has destroyed the boundaries between humans and wild animals'



ful in eliminating smallpox but failed in virtually every other major disease.

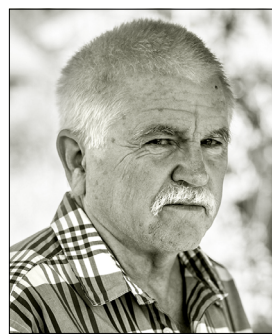
BUT THERE is an alternative tradition—one that looks at the socioeconomic determinants—poverty, lack of sanitation and so on. Now all the international infrastructure of disease detection and international coordinated response has just fallen apart.

The WHO has virtually collapsed—it has an absolutely marginal role. It's never been funded. Big countries like the US have never honoured the contributions they said they would make. The WHO has had to turn mainly to lobbying the most powerful countries and relying on philanthropists.

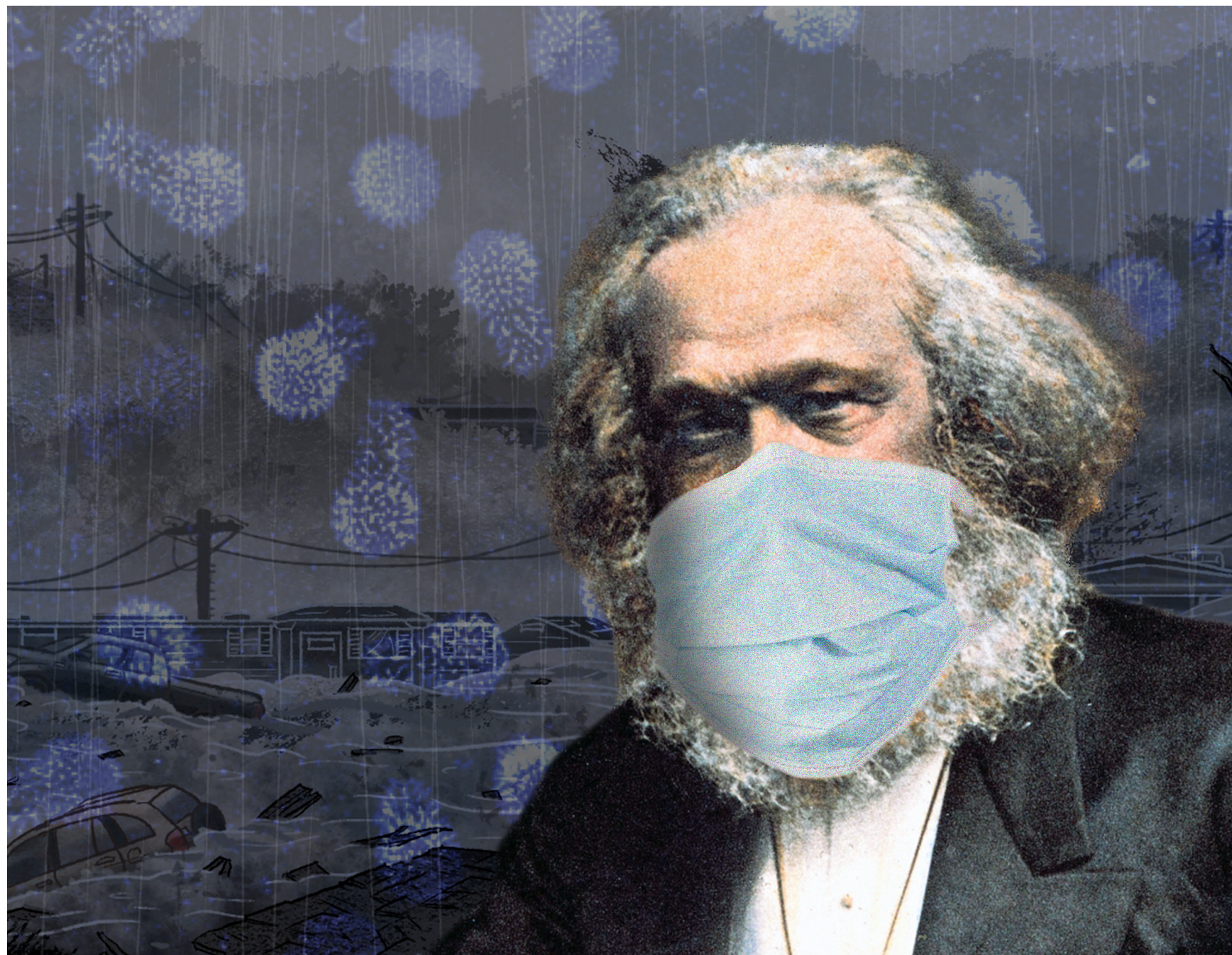
All this together provides about 80 percent of its budget. And it puts the WHO in a position where it's constantly engaged in flattery and solicitation of the US, China and philanthropists. This has become almost ludicrously evident over the last four or five months.

The American Centre for Disease Control (CDC)—which plays a international role and is responsible for much detection of emerging diseases—has collapsed too.

It decided not to use the test kits that had been developed by a German pharmaceutical company that everyone else in the world is using. And it developed



Mike Davis



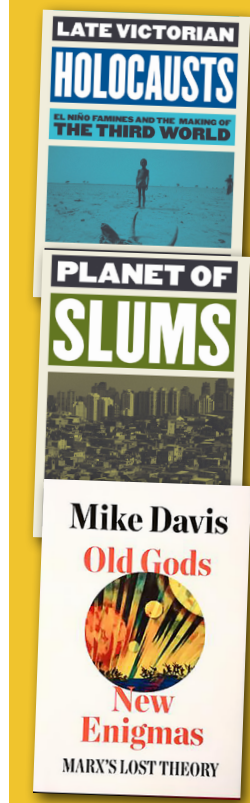
MARXISM IN AN AGE OF CATASTROPHE



We live in an era of plagues because of capitalist development, argues socialist author Mike Davis. But he also says coronavirus has exposed the gap between a tiny rich elite and the rest of us—and creates space to put forward socialist ideas

Factory farms, such as this US chicken operation, are 'particle accelerators' for disease (above) Protesters from the Otodo Gbame area of Lagos, Nigeria, fighting eviction and demanding better sanitation (below)

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'Will vaccines be for all the populations of Africa and South Asia? It's hard to see any reason why they will be. Here we see capitalism further widening the abyss between the two humanities'

Baby being vaccinated in India (above)

its own test kit, but it was flawed and gave out false results.

The CDC is funded by a right wing fundamentalist Christian and its budget was savagely cut by Donald Trump—one of his first acts as president.

The very moment of Trump's inauguration, he starts to dismantle the organisations and reverse the policies that have been specifically created to deal with pandemics.

Trump says this is the most technically and scientifically advanced country in the world on the same day the New York Times magazine prints instructions on how to sew your own surgical mask. And it's a worldwide crisis.

THE EUROPEAN Centre for Disease Control has been nowhere and the whole idea of the European Union is in deep crisis. For instance, there was an expectation from Italy that their European sisters would rush aid to them. But instead Germany, Austria and France prohibited the export of crucial supplies and materials.

China exudes enormous economic influence and has shaped the world economy over the last 20 years. But what China has lacked and is most desperately seeking is soft power and more political prestige.

Trump has totally abdicated any concept of American moral leadership or humanitarian response. So the Italians turned to Beijing, which has been at the forefront of providing crucial aid.

China has brought an immense capacity to provide key medical supplies. So it's everywhere on the ground, where Europe and the US are missing.

In the 17th century plagues, particularly in Italy, accelerated the transition from a Mediterranean-centred economy to a North Atlantic-centred economy.

So we have to ask if Covid-19 will start accelerating a change from US hegemony to Chinese hegemony.

The response to the outbreak has been totally nationalist, to the extent that it's surprised most of the world leaders and the nationalists themselves. International co-operation has collapsed.

Any recovery of globalised production depends on huge new efforts to create an international disease infrastructure. This could take the position to attack the pathogen and ignore the social conditions that make people

vulnerable—that in some ways are the ultimate causes of disease.

But it cannot bring on the vaccine and the anti-virals. So far the private sector has been an immense obstacle to the conversion of the new technologies.

The potential for biological design and scientific development has been blocked.

This is because the pharmaceutical industry no longer produces the lifeline medicines whose production in the past has been their justification for their monopoly position.

They don't make anti-virals, and for the large part they don't make vaccines. And they don't produce the new generation of antibiotics to face the global crisis. Big Pharma is basically trawling patents and spending more on advertising than on research and development.

They've become not only a fetter on the medical revolution and scientific revolution but have also engaged in price gouging and enormous political lobbying against generic drugs.

Can global capital overcome its current nationalist fragmentation and create an infrastructure to deal with its major interests, the continuity of profits and globalised production?

It also has to meet the health needs of the metropolitan populations because this is a global depression. And a depression whose roots are not in disease itself—although the disease has detonated it.

Misery

The major capitalist countries believe they can protect themselves in world trade, through accelerated development of vaccines and some new form of international public health organisation.

As long as they believe that there's absolutely no interest whatsoever in dealing with what's always the topic of the social medicine—misery and poverty on a world scale.

Will vaccines be available to all the populations of Africa and South Asia? It's hard to see any reason why they will be, and if they're available they'll come years later. Here we see global capitalism further deepening and widening the abyss between the two humanities.

Of course that's true inside other countries as well, where disease is contorted by the legacy of racism and poverty.

I think that right now, at least in the US, there is an extraordinary opportunity not only to advance a progressive agenda—health care as a human right and European-style universal coverage. But also to put forward demands that are essentially socialist, like to eliminate Big Pharma and nationalise big production of medicine.

For instance, Amazon is emerging into the biggest monopoly in world history. It's now arguing that it's an essential utility and the progressive response to that is to break it up or tax it. But it creates a field in which we can raise the traditional socialist demand—make it a public utility. It should be democratically controlled and owned by society.

This crisis offers new opportunities to go beyond left reformism and raise socialist ideas and demands.

Mike Davis is a Marxist author who writes about human geography, history and the environment. Mike was speaking at 'Marxism in the age of catastrophe' alongside Alex Callinicos. Footage of the meeting can be found at bit.ly/MarxismMikeDavis

WHAT WE STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown. Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls.

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism. In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women. We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests. We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

To join us, turn to page 16 or go to www.swp.org.uk or phone 020 7840 5602 for more information

Socialist Workers Party online meetings



The Socialist Workers Party is holding online meetings during the coronavirus crisis. This is to ensure that there can still be collective local discussion, organising and actions.

Most of the meetings will be held using the Zoom system. Download the Zoom app onto your phone or computer and at the time given for your local meeting ask to "Join a meeting".

You can then enter the number printed on this page for the appropriate meeting. **The password for all meetings is 967537.**

Make sure you look at the SWP Facebook page facebook.com/SocialistWorkersParty for news of national online meetings and other updates.

Coronavirus, the family and women's oppression

BLACK COUNTRY

Wed 29 Apr, 8pm
Zoom
352-891-2411

BRADFORD

Thu 30 Apr, 7pm
Zoom
542-511-903

BRISTOL

Thu 30 Apr, 7pm
Zoom
688-397-3148

LANCASTER AND MORECAMBE

Thu 23 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 992-204-9372

LONDON: SOUTH EAST

Wed 29 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom
530-913-6390

YORK & SCARBOROUGH

Wed 22 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom
827-489-7492

{ SOCIALIST WORKER }

ONLINE MEETINGS

Weekly meetings to discuss political issues and our local interventions. All welcome.

BIRMINGHAM

Politics of the mind—Marxism and mental distress
Wed 29 Apr, 7pm
Zoom
291-634-5938

BRIGHTON & HOVE

Capitalism, coronavirus and mental health
Thu 30 Apr, 6.30pm
Zoom

BURNLEY & PENDLE

From the Second World War to coronavirus—why we're not all in it together
Wed 29 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 446-409-5118

CAMBRIDGE

Booklaunch: Transgender Resistance, Socialism and the Fight for Trans Liberation
with author Laura Miles
Thu 30 Apr, 5pm
Zoom
681-800-4408

CARDIFF

Can workers run society?
Thu 29 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom

CHESTERFIELD

Pandemic, Trump and resistance—what's happening in China?
Thu 30 Apr, 7pm
Zoom
828-532-8731

COVENTRY

Tony Cliff's legacy—revolutionary politics today
Wed 29 Apr, 7pm
Zoom
587-183-5359

DUNDEE & ABERDEEN

Who decides the limits of free speech?
Wed 29 Apr, 8pm
Zoom 396-573-1805

EDINBURGH

Socialists, the state and the crisis
Wed 29 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom

ESSEX

After Starmer's election—is Corbynism dead?
Thu 30 Apr, 7pm
Zoom

EXETER

After Starmer's election—is Corbynism dead?
Wed 29 Apr, 7pm
Zoom

GLASGOW

Social media, social distancing and socialism
Thu 30 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 559-617-450

HUDDERSFIELD

Coronavirus, capitalism and economic crisis
Wed 29 Apr, 7pm
Zoom
234-919-9440

LEEDS

Coronavirus, capitalism and economic crisis
Thu 30 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 856-912-7408

LIVERPOOL

Can workers run society?
Thu 30 Apr, 7pm
Zoom

LONDON: HACKNEY

Coronavirus and climate crisis
Thu 30 Apr, 7pm
Zoom

LONDON: HARINGEY

After Starmer's election—is Corbynism dead?
Wed 29 Apr, 7pm
Zoom

LONDON: ISLINGTON

Coronavirus and the economic aftermath
Thu 30 Apr, 6.30pm
Zoom

LONDON: NEWHAM

After Starmer's election—is Corbynism dead?
Wed 29 Apr, 7pm
Zoom

LONDON: SOUTH

Coronavirus, capitalism and the global south
Wed 29 Apr, 7pm
Zoom

LONDON: WALTHAM FOREST

Where does racism come from?
Wed 29 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 543-023-057

MANCHESTER:

Fascism, the far right and pandemics
Wed 29 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 806-867-681

NEWCASTLE

Trotsky and the united front
Wed 29 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 368-595-7212

NORWICH

Food, pandemics and climate change
Wed 29 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 906-652-5309

NOTTINGHAM & DERBY

From the Second World War to coronavirus—why we're not all in it together
Wed 29 Apr, 7pm

OXFORD

From the Second World War to coronavirus—why we're not all in it together
Thu 30 Apr, 6.30pm
Zoom 911-4036-6793

PORTSMOUTH

From the Second World War to coronavirus—why we're not all in it together
Wed 29 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 488-934-2809

SHEFFIELD & SOUTH YORKSHIRE

India—the state response to the crisis
Thu 30 Apr, 7pm
Zoom 528-174-9278

SOUTHAMPTON

Fake news and alternative facts—who controls the media?
Wed 29 Apr, 7.30pm
381-513-5080

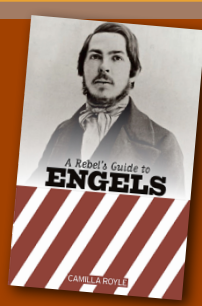
SWANSEA

Coronavirus—how capitalism makes us sick
Thu 30 Apr, 7.30pm
Zoom 248-448-3170

BOOKMARKS the socialist bookshop



The Labour Party—A Marxist History
by Tony Cliff, Donny Gluckstein and Charlie Kimber, £14.99



A Rebel's Guide to Engels
by Camilla Royle
£4



Hegel and Revolution
by Terry Sullivan and Donny Gluckstein, £7



Transgender Resistance
by Laura Miles
£10

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Normal People is a powerful drama with truth and depth

This BBC adaptation brings the complicated—and therefore believable—characters of Sally Rooney’s popular novel to screen, writes **Sarah Bates**

CONNELL AND Marianne are the lovers in Normal People—a 12-part dramatisation that’s likely to be the TV highlight of the year for fans of the book.

Based on Sally Rooney’s hugely successful novel, it’s the story of an intense love affair between young people fumbling to find their place in the world.

It follows Connell, played by Paul Mescal, a popular but shy teenager with a gift for sports.

On the face of it, Connell seems to have everything he wants—teenage popularity, a loving mother and academic ability.

But really, he struggles to find his place within his peer group—too bookish for his laddish mates, but also desperately keen to fit in.

Daisy Edgar-Jones’s Marianne—arrogant, middle class and undeniably clever—is the object of his affections.

Mercilessly bullied by her family and peers alike, Marianne has a difficult time of it.

It’s genuinely heartbreaking to see her describe Connell as “nicer than most” after he humiliates her.

Edgar-Jones’s Marianne feels so similar to the novel it’s like she’s tumbled straight off the page.

Meanwhile, it stretches belief to imagine that teenage Connell looks anything like 24 year old Paul Mescal.

Watching Connell ignore Marianne’s bullying—which often comes in the form of sexist taunts about her looks—is stomach churning.

It’s painful to watch him repeatedly tell Marianne that no one at school should know about their relationship. But this doesn’t collapse



DAISY EDGAR-JONES and Paul Mescal as Marianne and Connell

into the teen romcom tropes of a popular jock and beautiful nerd.

And the sex scenes between them feel very authentic—awkward but tender, joyful and spontaneous.

Despite Marianne and Connell’s quiet confidence, they are both crushed by anxiety.

They’re both so worried about how they fit into this world.

The story spans four years from school right through to the end of university. There’s space to see how teenage Marianne bears very little

relation to the postgraduate one. At university, the tables are very much turned.

Marianne finds herself with a plush flat, academic respect, a new boyfriend—and most importantly, a group of friends.

As they both become more aware of what they want from a relationship, it makes things more complicated between them, not less.

Rooney wrote some episodes of Normal People.

One of the great strengths of her

work is that the interactions between her characters feels believable.

At just 30 minutes apiece, the first four episodes feel punchy enough.

But at times the tempo starts to drift.

There are probably a few too many soft focus shots of Sligo’s coastline and moody acoustic music.

Nevertheless, Normal People is a good stopgap for anyone waiting for Rooney’s next release.

Starts on BBC3, Sunday 26 April at 9pm

A violent and pessimistic film about human nature

FILM

THE PLATFORM

Available now on Netflix

ARE PEOPLE too selfish to prevent others from starving to death? That’s the central question of the film *The Platform*, recently made available on Netflix.

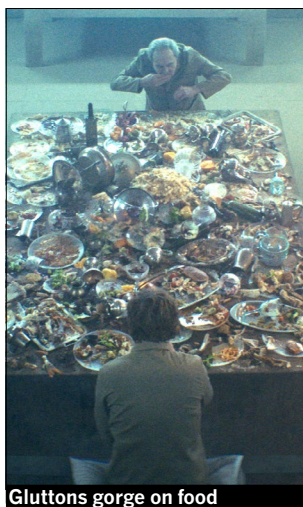
Part parable about overconsumption, part enquiry about human nature, it’s a hard watch.

The viewer is invited to believe in a dystopian society which sees people volunteering to be incarcerated in a

multi-level prison called The Pit. The protagonist Goreng, played by Ivan Massague, has implausibly volunteered to be imprisoned so he can get a degree and give up cigarettes.

The frequent, gratuitous and brutal action arises when a food-laden platform descends through the facility, pausing for two minutes at each of the 333 levels.

Despite the platform holding enough to feed everyone in the prison, selfish gluttons at the top mean those at the lowest



Gluttons gorge on food

levels are condemned to starvation or cannibalism.

Goreng, spurred on by one of the administrators of the system, decides to intervene when he finds himself transported to one of the higher floors.

He and his cellmate stand on the platform as it descends and ration out the food so everyone can have something to eat.

In perhaps the most bizarre episode, they pledge to defend a panna cotta to send back as a message to the people at the top. There is a debate about whether people

can be convinced to leave enough for others or if they need to be treated with maximum aggression.

The compromise is asking nicely then promptly executing those who don’t do as asked.

All of the strategies rely on an enlightened minority defending the population of The Pit from their own selfish natures.

There are a lot of half-baked political points in *The Platform*. Focusing on one or two and developing them may have proven less risible.

Alistair Farrow

DOCUMENTARY

THE DIRTY WAR ON THE NHS

By John Pilger.

Available to stream at

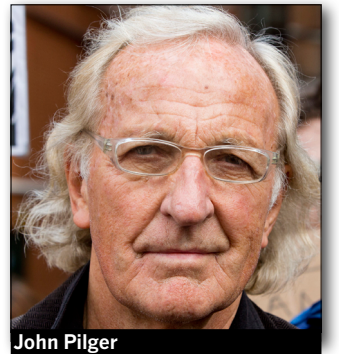
bit.ly/Curzon-Dirty-War

£4.99

CINEMA CHAIN Curzon has made *The Dirty War on the NHS*, a documentary from renowned Bafta and Emmy-winning film-maker and journalist John Pilger, available to stream.

“This film is a tribute to a unique institution,” says Pilger at the start of the film.

Above all, it is a warning. Pilger investigates the dismantling “by stealth”



John Pilger

of the National Health Service, “a last bastion of true public service”. After the film, you can watch a recording of a recent Q&A session with Pilger.

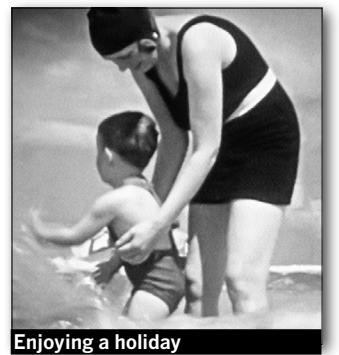
FILM

HOMELAND HOLIDAYS AND OTHER ARCHIVE FOOTAGE

Available for free at bit.ly/BFI-holidays

THE BRITISH Film Institute has a vast archive of historical footage—and has picked out some films and documentaries depicting people on holiday.

One—*Homeland Holidays*—is a short film from 1937 on resorts



Enjoying a holiday

owned by the Workers Travel Association.

Set up in 1921 by trade unions, the Labour Party and the Co-Operative movement, it aimed to provide affordable holidays for working class families.

It’s a—perhaps idealised—insight into one aspect of working class life in the 1930s.



Capitalist society is hurtling towards catastrophe with climate change, global slump, pandemics and the threat of nuclear war.

The ideas of Vladimir Lenin, who was born 150 years ago this month, remain crucial for all of us who want to get rid of this rotten system.

Most people will have heard caricatures of Lenin.

These claim he was a dogmatist and dictator who seized power in a coup and led to the horrors of Joseph Stalin's Russia.

This is not the reality.

Lenin's politics were formed at another time of huge crises that showed the system's disregard for ordinary people's lives.

He developed new ideas as he grappled with unprecedented problems. And they were tested in the battles against the system—and helped to usher in revolutionary change.

For a large part of his political life, Lenin had been around and part of Europe's socialist parties.

But Lenin's Bolshevik party was the only one to see a successful workers' revolution in Russia 1917. This was no accident.

Lenin explored ideas about war, imperialism, the state and support for oppressed people.

And, crucially, he understood the need for socialists to build a revolutionary organisation in order to change the world.

Conflict between working class people and bosses is built into capitalism. Bigger revolts and revolutions start as spontaneous struggles often over specific issues.

The February Revolution in Russia in 1917 began as a protest over bread shortages.

The recent revolt against neoliberalism in Chile began as a protest over metro ticket prices. In Iran fuel price rises were the spark.

Challenge

Struggles can develop into a broader challenge to the system. What's not inevitable is that they win.

In every struggle there's a battle between reformist forces that limit changes within the system and those who want revolutionary change.

A revolutionary organisation on the model Lenin argued for is vital to have a better chance of success.

You can see that during the wave of revolt across the world before the coronavirus.

In Sudan, for instance, a mass movement successfully forced out dictator Omar al-Bashir.

The mass movement then gathered in the streets to demand an end to military rule.

And as it deepened, ordinary people began to question how society was organised. In some



LENIN SPEAKS to a crowd

LENIN AND HIS IDEAS TODAY

In a time when capitalism is in crisis, the works and life of the revolutionary Vladimir Lenin—born 150 years ago this week—are still crucial, writes Tomáš Tengely-Evans



Vladimir Lenin

of the squares, people set up revolutionary committees that showed a glimpse of how society could be run democratically from the bottom up.

Groups of organised workers had played an important role in the Sudanese revolt. The logical next step could have been to set up workers' councils, which could have broken the power of the regime.

The Financial Times reported, "One cannot know for sure what Russia felt like in 1917 as the tsar



A revolutionary party is about building an organisation of militants

was being toppled. But it must have felt something like the capital Khartoum in April 2019."

But Sudan didn't see workers seize power for themselves like in Russia 1917.

The leadership of the mass movement was dominated by political forces that weren't willing to go all the way.

They signed up to a shoddy deal with the regime—which used it as an opportunity to clamp down on opponents. There was no revolutionary

socialist organisation in Sudan that could have argued against compromise and to deepen the revolution.

Opponents of Lenin argue that the revolutionary party is an authoritarian or elitist idea. They use What Is To Be Done?—a pamphlet from 1902 about how socialist parties should organise—as evidence of this.

In it Lenin writes that "class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from outside". This can sound like socialists should just tell the rest of the movement what to do or impose their ideas onto the working class. But that wasn't Lenin's argument.

Many of his works are polemics written during a particular row that had come up in the movement. When Lenin wrote What is to be done? he was battling against the "economists". They thought that workers' struggles over bread and butter issues, for example wages or working conditions, would build up into socialism.

He said their "economism systematically restricts the workers' movement to defending its sectional interests".

For Lenin, revolutionary socialists had to be "tribunes of the oppressed" not just the "trade union secretary".

Elsewhere in the What Is To Be Done, he writes that socialists have to be "able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression" and "generalise all these manifestations" to show other workers how the system produces exploitation and oppression.

Militants

A revolutionary party isn't about being separate from the working class or mass movements. It's about building an organisation of working class militants, who draw struggles together into a bigger fight against the system as a whole.

The precise way a revolutionary party organises depends on the political circumstances and Lenin was flexible about the specific features, but whether it's in a parliamentary democracy or authoritarian state, the need for a revolutionary party remains.

It flows from how working class people's ideas are uneven. Some want to tear the head off capitalism, while others are reactionaries who buy into it the system. The majority sit somewhere in between with progressive and backward ideas.

A reformist party—such as the Labour Party—reflects all of those contradictions and panders to backward ideas. A revolutionary party organises together the most militant fighters.

To be effective, a revolutionary organisation can't just be set up during a revolution. Lenin's Bolshevik party was built in difficult conditions before 1905 and 1917. It had tested out ideas, made mistakes, learned lessons and won respect in the working class movement. It

had also learned from workers' struggles. During the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, Russian workers spontaneously set up the ir own soviets (workers' councils).

Lenin recognised they were "organs of revolutionary rule". And by the time of October 1917, he grasped that they are the basis of a new workers' state and raised the slogan, "All power to the soviets."

ONE reason why Lenin consistently argued for revolution is because he understood the role of the state in capitalist society.

In State and Revolution, Lenin argued against the idea that the state is a neutral body. "The state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another," he wrote.

"So long as the state exists there is no freedom. When there is freedom, there will be no state."

Elections and parliament gives a measure of limited democracy. But the capitalist state is run by vast unelected bureaucracies of civil servants, judges, generals and spooks.

These are backed up by cops and the army and the threat of force—what Lenin called "special bodies" of armed people.

They look out for the interests of the corporations that make all the major economic decisions.

That's why workers can't use the existing state to change society. They have to set up their own democratic organisations and take political power for themselves in a socialist revolution. There have been changes to the state since Lenin was writing, but its repressive function remains.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was a genuine socialist revolution where workers seized power and briefly ran society by themselves.

Lenin had always been clear that it had to spread to other advanced countries or "we perish".

The revolutionary wave in Europe didn't succeed, which left the Russian Revolution isolated. Fourteen imperialist armies invaded to back up forces that wanted a return of the old order.

The civil war devastated the working class that had made the revolution and hollowed



Women march in Russia, 1917 (top) Crowds in Sudan in 2019 (above)

out the soviets, undermining the basis of workers' power.

The Bolsheviks were left in charge of a vast bureaucracy and desperately tried to defend some of the gains of the revolution.

But Joseph Stalin represented a counter-revolutionary break. All the social gains—abortion, divorce, legalisation of homosexuality—were reversed. The last remnants of workers' control were abolished. By 1930 the bureaucracy led by Stalin had developed its own class interests. Russia became a state capitalist country, which exploited workers and competed with rivals in the West. That wasn't an inevitable consequence of Lenin's ideas or dictatorial ambitions.

His ideas can still help fight against a brutal system.

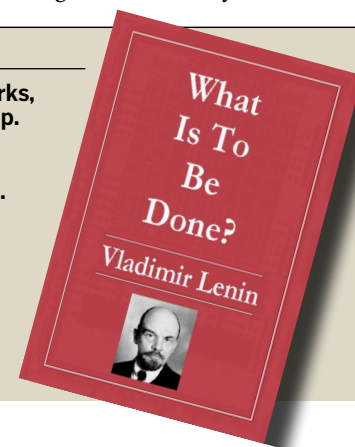
READ MORE

●What is to be Done? By VI Lenin £8.95

●State and Revolution By VI Lenin £5

●Lenin—Building the Party By Tony Cliff £10

Available at Bookmarks, the socialist bookshop. Phone 020 7637 1848 or go to www.bookmarksbookshop.co.uk



Conspiracy theories don't explain society's problems

Sophie Squire asks what makes people believe in conspiracy theories—and looks at why they're ultimately a dead end

IN A time of uncertainty and confusion, conspiracy theories are gaining traction.

A popular theory is that the rollout of 5G mobile network is responsible for spreading Covid-19.

Several 5G masts were set on fire across Britain and Europe in the last few weeks allegedly due to fear of them weakening people's immune systems.

It's not the case that working class people believe conspiracy theories because they are stupid.

It's often because they sense they are often fed lies from the mainstream.

The origins of Covid-19 and other questions about the virus aren't clear to everyone.

This is partly because governments will pick and choose what information they release to the public according to what suits their agenda.

It's a similar picture with the mass media.

The Ofcom media regulator said the BBC was the most used news source among adults in 2019.

The BBC has a long history of media manipulation and focusing on news that fits its political agenda.

Millions of people will have questions that are not being answered by the media that most of us consume.

Traction

So it's not surprising that conspiracy theories that gain traction on WhatsApp groups and social media can seem to offer answers.

Some people are drawn to conspiracy theories because they simply don't believe the information that the state puts out. This distrust in the government or the media is well-placed.

During the coronavirus crisis, the Tories have lied about testing, personal

SOME BLAME the pandemic on new mobile technology

protective equipment and a host of issues that make their government look bad. Ordinary people don't believe everything the state wants them to—because government and media messages don't always reflect their experiences.

And at the centre of almost all conspiracy theories is a deep seated distrust in those who govern society.

But conspiracy theories lay the blame for the problems of the world in the wrong places.

Toxic

And some conspiracy theories can reflect the toxic ideas in society pushed by those who are responsible for crises.

These can boost the racism that is pushed from the top of society and distract from the real divide—that between rich and poor.

And it's useful for governments if people are deflected from their own failings and misdeeds.

US president Donald Trump has pushed the theory that the latest strain of coronavirus escaped

from a lab in China.

"More and more we're hearing the story," he told a press conference last week.

The ruling class does want to control the world—and goes about it in secretive and undemocratic ways.

Time and time again the tiny cabal at the top of society fix election results, install right wing regimes, order assassinations and organise coups.

But as socialists we don't think it's just individual leaders or corrupt governments that are the problem.

We believe that the problems in society exist because of how our system is structured.

So ultimately conspiracy theories let capitalism off the hook and often lead nowhere.

Disempowering

And they can have a disempowering effect on people who think that conspiracies loom so large in society it makes change impossible.

They offer no solution to the world's problems.

And they make people believe that those that control our world cannot be challenged.

Instead socialists believe that working people have the power to change society.

During this crisis working class people will be looking for answers to why this crisis happened, and why it is hitting them the hardest.

But it's socialism that holds the answers, not conspiracy theories.



Problems in society exist because of the way the system is structured

Big business still giving bosses massive handouts

by CHARLIE KIMBER

DON'T LISTEN to bosses bleating about corporate hardship—they are still preparing to deliver tens of billions of pounds in dividends to shareholders.

Dividend payments go overwhelmingly to people who are already very rich. They are the ultimate form of unearned income.

Analysis written last week by Russ Mould, investment director for brokers and investment advisers A J Bell, details the scale of the handouts.

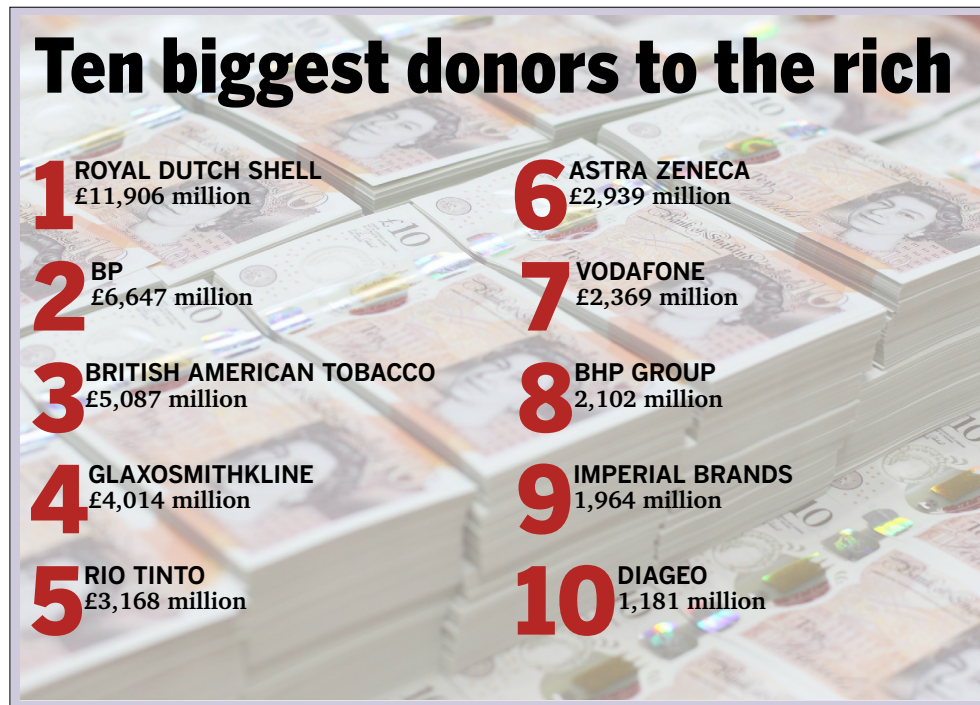
Withholding

It says that although some companies are withholding dividends, the estimates for 2020 suggest many big firms are ploughing ahead with handouts for the wealthy.

Hundreds of millions of workers across the world are fearful for their jobs and their incomes.

But dividends seem virtually guaranteed.

A J Bell continues, "Of the top ten payers by actual size of distribution, Shell



and BP have both offered trading statements which have emphasised how cuts to capital investment, cost reductions, asset disposals and fresh debt would provide ample liquidity.

"Shell suspended its

buyback programme but neither firm even mentioned the dividends, suggesting Shell and BP seem determined to defend their planned payments.

"The only other one of the top ten to offer a firm

statement is Diageo which has confirmed payment of its interim dividend for the six months to December 2019.

"Further down, Legal & General has brushed aside entreaties from the Prudential Regulatory Authority and

declared its intention to pay a final dividend for 2019.

"Tesco has declared a final dividend and stuck to its plan to pay a special dividend in the second half once the sale of its Thai and Malaysian grocery chains to

FIGURE IT OUT

● Ten firms are forecast to pay out £42 billion in dividends in 2020. If these ten pay out and no other company does, then the FTSE 100's dividend yield would be 2.7 percent, over the rate of inflation

● Some 15 firms are forecast to pay out £49 billion in dividends in 2020. If these 15 pay out and the other 85 offer nothing, then the FTSE 100's dividend yield would be 3.1 percent

● And 20 firms are forecast to pay out £54 billion. If these 20 pay out and nobody else does, then the FTSE 100's dividend yield would be 3.4 percent

go through. SSE has repeated its goal of an 80p-per-share distribution."

The brokers do however warn its "income-seekers" that "Companies which accept government help in the form of relief from business rates, delayed VAT payments, the staff furlough scheme or perhaps even the Bank of England's Covid Corporate Financing Facility will wish to avoid giving the impression that they are drawing on the public purse with one hand and then handing that money to shareholders with another."

Pocketed

That's exactly what Tesco did recently. The firm pocketed £585 million in emergency business rates relief from the government and then handed £900 million to shareholders.

All in it together? Workers will be told to accept lower wages, harder working and austerity while the rich cash in their dividends.

More online
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www.socialistworker.co.uk

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Time to leave the Labour Party and fight for change outside it

The Labour Party's structures have always privileged its MPs and the right wing who hold members in contempt. The left shouldn't be their willing hostages again, writes Nick Clark

STAY AND fight is the conclusion many Labour activists have drawn in the aftermath of a leaked report exposing sabotage by right wing party bureaucrats.

Just as left wing members were despairing at Keir Starmer's election as leader—many even considering quitting—something emerged to say the battle isn't over.

Labour could have won the general election in 2017 if it wasn't for a small band of officials working dead-set against Corbyn, the report suggests.

Quit, and you give them what they wanted all along. Stay, and they could yet face a reckoning.

It's certainly shocking just how viciously Labour's full time staff were opposed to their own leader, let alone their members.

But what is it that could make Labour Party staff hope for a Tory victory? How do such people end up working so high up in the party?

And why do they feel entitled to control it?

The set-up that Corbyn clashed with was a legacy of the days of Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband.

Blair's attempt to transform Labour into a purely pro-business party involved trying to deny the members any sort of democratic process whatsoever.

Certainly that contempt for the members, and disdain for anything to the left of Blair and Brown, shines through in the report.

Yet that tension has been a feature of Labour ever since it was founded.

Labour's first significant tranche of MPs began defying the wishes of supporters almost as soon as they

were elected in 1906.

When supporters complained, Labour agreed that the Parliamentary Labour Party was entitled to ignore conference.

And because for Labour what MPs do in parliament is the most important thing, they got away with it.

It's been that way ever since.

There have been attempts to "reclaim" Labour for the members throughout its history.

Each one has made some gains—and faced purges. Socialist League members—led by Aneurin Bevan and Stafford Cripps—were expelled in the 1930s.

Left wing groups were hunted out of the party in the 1980s and 90s.

Importantly, each purge followed a confrontation that ended in a retreat by the left, and a refusal to break from the right entirely.

Bevan and Cripps made their peace with austerity and nuclear weapons for the sake of a Labour government and the national interest.

Tony Benn ended his battle when the right told him he threatened Labour with electoral defeat.

Each defeat restored the right's power at the top of the party, enforced by purges and attacks on members.

And each time left activists argued for members to bunker down and fight another day.

In practice they were willing hostages of a party machinery that holds them in contempt.

Left set for futile faction fights

THE reality of what "stay and fight" will mean in the Labour Party seems a pretty dispiriting prospect.

In the wake of Keir Starmer's election as leader, every wing of the party is organising for what looks like some gruelling internal battles ahead.

The right, organised by the Labour First and Progress factions, have joined forces.

Under Corbyn they tried to rally their supporters to block left wing members getting anywhere in their Constituency Labour Parties.

Now their umbrella organisation, Labour to Win, is going to provide "information, arguments and organisational support" to marginalise the left.

Left wing groups are also uniting.

The Labour Representation Committee, Red Labour and Jewish Voice for Labour want to oppose the Tories. The focus is "reconstruction" of the left inside Labour.

Meanwhile, Momentum is trying to regroup.

It's main aim in all this is to get back to winning positions on committees and pushing motions at conference that end up being ignored.

It would be a disaster if left wing activists were encouraged to stay in Labour only to pour their time and energy into hours of internal, bureaucratic wrangling.

Union leaders are conservative force within Labour

MANY OF the officials named in the report were closely connected to Labour's trade union backers.

Labour's then general secretary Iain McNicol, who oversaw attempts to exclude members from leadership elections, had been a GMB union political officer.

Another, Emilie Oldknow, is now assistant general secretary in the Unison union.

She apparently sent abusive messages about Corbyn supporters, and tried to get left wing MP Rebecca Long-Bailey

removed from a panel to select Labour's candidate in a by-election.

While leaders of the GMB and Unison were claiming to support Corbyn's leadership, officials linked to them were working to undermine them.

And now those same leaders are offering the plotters their protection.

In an open letter to Unison general secretary Dave Prentis, elected union officials and members condemned the behaviour exposed in the report.

They said the union must "identify if any

individuals employed by Unison, or those which held Labour Party positions by virtue of their membership of Unison, in the period of the report were aware of these actions".

Yet Prentis reportedly told senior Labour staff named in the report that he'll back them.

Meanwhile, Labour staff in the GMB union passed a motion condemning Labour's current general secretary Jennie Formby for the leak of the report.

Formby was herself a senior Unite union official. Unite general secretary

Len McCluskey backed Corbyn—but even he would only go so far.

He condemned the behaviour described in the leak, but ultimately called on members to unite behind right wing leader Keir Starmer.

Unions are there to defend workers' interests.

But the union bureaucracy sees electing a Labour government as the way to get social change—and that ultimately means maintaining unity with the right.

Socialist polices are—wrongly—seen as obstacles to success.

Emilie Oldknow

Building bosses putting lives at risk by ignoring ‘distancing’

by SIMON BASKETTER

CONSTRUCTION BOSSES are forcing workers to put their lives at risk.

They have repeatedly called for construction workers to be treated as “essential workers”.

Their reasoning is that as long as people are still building banks and offices in central London, there is still profit to be made.

On Monday a number of sites in England reopened after allegedly new procedures were put in place.

The Construction Leadership Council (CLC) is a bosses’ organisation made up of the largest firms.

Its co-chair is MP Nadhim Zahawi, who is also the Tory minister for business and industry.

The CLC is now onto its third set of advice for “Site Operating Procedures” since the advent of the coronavirus.

One was published 1 April then withdrawn just hours later. It seems that the bosses’ advice was too stringent for the bosses.

It was replaced with less strict advice that had previously been issued on 23 March.

The 1 April guidelines said the two-metre rule to keep people distanced from each other was necessary. But the CLC retreated to the earlier advice which suggested two-metre social distancing is simply a good idea.

Observed

The CLC updated its advice on Site Operating Procedures again on 15 April, suggesting alternative ways of working.

This includes limiting the number of workers in a space where social distancing is not being observed, and getting workers to bring their own food instead of using canteens.

It still does not require social distancing. It does not consider that PPE should be worn to protect against the coronavirus, except as a “last resort”.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has signed up to these guidelines, though how it plans to enforce them is a mystery. The HSE

has not been carrying out routine site visits since March.

The complex webs of subcontracting and tendering competition are partially behind the drive to keep the sites open.

The Financial Times newspaper reported that delays to construction will breach existing contracts with landowners and developers, with legal action likely.

While house building has slowed dramatically, major construction work continues.

The unions, while expressing concerns for safety, seem keen to play their part in keeping the sites going.

For instance, Unite and train drivers’ union Aslef asked for start times at construction sites to be staggered to avoid peak time overcrowding on Tubes and trains.

Required

Unite official Pete Kavanagh said, “It is imperative that construction firms stagger workers’ start and finish times.

“This should be happening on every site and employers should be liaising with each other, but also with oversight from industry federations, to make sure these times are different.”

Which is a little short of what is required.

Construction workers are forced to go to work, particularly since umbrella schemes and bogus self-employment mean that for most there are no financial safety nets.

The bosses’ attitude to workers’ on-site safety is unreliable at the best of times. Some 2,926 enforcement notices, which require a change due to an unsafe situation, were issued on sites in 2019.

On average, more than 30 workers a year die on sites. The rate of reported serious injuries is three times that of other workers.

Now more lives are being put at risk so the building bosses can keep their profits. If a site isn’t building a hospital or similar it should be closed—and the building bosses’ huge profits should pay the wages of the workers.

CONSTRUCTION BOSSES want workers, such as these at Hinkley Point, declared “essential”

Those who want schools re-opened must say how they will keep us safe

THERE HAS been much talk recently about the prospect of schools reopening.

While it may be true that young people are less susceptible to the coronavirus, pupils have teachers, support staff, school leaders and other adults in their schools.

All of these are potentially more vulnerable.

And has it escaped politicians and media commentators’ attention that children also live with families?

If the rest of the country has to continue to maintain social distancing, how on earth are teachers and pupils expected to do this in already over-sized classes and without adequate safety measures in place?

Before any return is considered, we need to see evidence, research and all of our

questions answered.

For example, would there be concrete plans to have regular testing of children and staff, availability of appropriate PPE, and enhanced building cleaning?

These are things the government is already struggling with. And what will we do to support students and staff in vulnerable health categories?

We need to oppose reopening schools before these and many other questions have been answered.

To do anything other would be foolhardy.

The only sensible line to take is that schools and colleges should only reopen when it is safe to do so.

As Mary Bousted, the joint secretary of the National Education Union, said, “The conditions are not yet in place

to even begin to envisage when schools might reopen, and loose talk only serves to give mixed messages about social distancing.

“At present, social distancing is the only protection we have against the spread of Covid-19.”
Leigh-Amanda Seedhouse

Testing time for surveyor

A SURVEYOR has been arrested on suspicion of illegally selling coronavirus testing kits to construction workers in a National Crime Agency investigation.

The 39 year old surveyor from Uxbridge, west London, was stopped on Sunday while driving his car.

Inside the vehicle were

250 Covid-19 testing kits.

He was arrested under the Fraud Act 2006 after making false and misleading claims about the capability of the tests.

He told investigators he was planning on selling the kits to construction workers.

He was released on conditional bail.

HEALTH WORKERS

Walk off by workers against outsourcer

by TOMÁS TENGELY-EVANS

HEALTH WORKERS at St George's medical school in south London are fighting to stop bosses putting profit before their lives.

UWV union members at St George's University of London in Tooting are demanding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the coronavirus crisis.

They are employed on zero hour contracts by outsourcing company Bidvest Noonan.

The union said the fight "included a walk off" by some of the workers.

Cetin, a UWV member and security guard, said, "We are not only putting our wellbeing, but our families and colleagues' wellbeing, at risk."

"Noonan has failed us."

Safety

Workers say that the outsourcer has failed to provide any safety guidance—and forced them to improvise their own while management work from home.

Cyril, another security guard and UWV member, said, "I asked for all deliveries to be suspended because



WORKERS AT St George's struck in February

PICTURE: UWV

we deal with them and that didn't happen.

"I also asked for all students' visitors to be suspended during this time, but had no response."

"University management via email requested one of us to escort a student into another room without PPE to retrieve a plant."

"We keep getting these requests from them while they sit in the safety and comfort of their homes."

Many students are self-isolating at the medical school.

The UWV members were already in a long-running dispute over pay, terms and conditions before the coronavirus crisis.

They are demanding the same pay, terms and conditions as those staff directly employed by the university.

This includes six months sick pay, 28 days holiday a year and a better value pension scheme. Noonan bosses

made an offer at the end of March that included three weeks guaranteed sick pay.

But the proposal included the loss of a paid lunch break—effectively making it a pay cut—and workers say bosses failed to negotiate. "This is outrageous," Cetin said.

"They have had no dialogue with us."

"They haven't attempted to contact us, they've sprung the new contract on us."

RAIL WORKERS

Mitie uses crisis to take away Merseyrail pay award

THE RMT rail union has blasted Merseyrail station cleaning and facilities' contractor Mitie for using the cover of the Covid-19 crisis to withdraw a pay award.

The union said the withdrawal is a profiteering move that displays the most disgraceful and cynical opportunism in the midst of the current emergency.

The pay offer, which followed a long campaign, would have lifted pay rates to £9 per hour.

It was hoped this would later see workers lifted onto the Real Living Wage.

The union had accepted the backdated offer but workers have now been informed by email that it has been pulled. This denies them £500 in back

pay and leaves them with the prospect of being £1,000 a year worse off.

The RMT's executive will now consider declaring a formal dispute as part of a campaign to secure justice for workers who have kept Merseyrail services running throughout the coronavirus crisis.

RMT general secretary Mick Cash said, "We know that the public in Merseyside will be as outraged as we are and will want to join us in a campaign to reverse this sickening decision."

"RMT's executive will now consider the political, industrial and public campaign we will be mounting. Rest assured we will fight for pay and workplace justice."

CARE WORKERS

Carers shouldn't pay fees

THE UNITE union in Scotland has written to Dundee city council leader John Alexander demanding an urgent meeting over the registration fees row facing the city's care workers.

The local authority has refused to pay the cost of the Scottish Social Services Council registration fee.

Instead it intends to impose the costs directly on the low paid care workers, who are predominantly female.

The annual registration fees start at £25 for all support workers and £35

for residential childcare and schoolcare workers.

For social work managers and care inspectors the annual fee is £80.

Unite's members have also raised a collective grievance.

Unite regional industrial officer Bob MacGregor said, "Unite is demanding the city council reverse the decision to impose registration costs on to carers who are presently putting their lives on the line."

"It will be very bitter pill for carers to swallow if they are forced to pay this fee."

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Action is needed to win council workers' pay rise

LOCAL government employers in England and Wales last week offered just a 2.75 percent pay rise for over a million workers for 2020-21.

This is well short of the unions' 10 percent claim.

The LGA employers' body has asked the government to fund an additional pay increase in addition to its offer.

GMB national secretary Rehana Azam said, "We rejected the initial opening offer of 2 percent as it was woefully low—and that was before the seismic shift caused by coronavirus."

"We will let GMB members have their say on pay."

Unite's national officer for local government Jim Kennedy said, "This is a totally unrealistic offer,

especially given the current crisis where it is our frontline local authority workers who are protecting our communities and vital services."

"They are caring for our young and our vulnerable elderly, collecting our rubbish, cleaning our streets, and working in our crematoria to ensure dignity for those who have, sadly, fallen victim to this terrible virus."

"The employers say that they will lobby ministers for additional money for pay—and while we will support that call to government, there can be no kicking the can down the road, yet again."

Getting a decent pay rise from councils and the Tories will take action, not just words."

MERTHYR TYDFIL

MERTHYR TYDFIL council in south Wales has been forced into a U-turn over its decision to re-open recycling and waste centres.

The move follows protests by the GMB and Unison unions.

The council had decided to start up its sites in Dowlais and Aberfan from Monday this week.

But unions said the decision was "reckless and unnecessary".

The unions said re-opening the sites would encourage the public to breach government guidance on travel and social distancing.

They advised their members not to return to work at the two centres and protested to the council.

The council said, "A decision has now been made not to open our household waste recycling centres."

Unison regional organiser Steve Belcher said, "We welcome the council's decision."

UNIVERSITIES

Stop attacks in Durham

THE UCU union has attacked a leaked plan by Durham university bosses to slash face-to-face teaching by up to a quarter.

The plans were reported in student newspaper Palatine. It also said bosses want to outsource online learning to private providers. Both changes would put workers' jobs and conditions at risk, and damage education.

The UCU said universities shouldn't treat coronavirus as "an opportunity to try and drastically alter their business models". It added that Durham bosses should consult with workers and students before making changes.

UCU general secretary Jo Grady said, "This looks like an attack on hard working staff—all to line the pockets of private providers. Durham needs to halt these plans. We will do everything we can to challenge this."

NHS

Workers fight for safe kit

>>>continued from page 20
tried to block members from making public demands for better health and safety measures.

But even the most reluctant leaders have slowly been forced to offer some words reflecting their members' anger.

Unison and Unite union national officials warned over the weekend that there could be walkouts over the lack of proper PPE.

Unite assistant general secretary Gail Cartmail said, "Unite has already advised its 100,000 members that reluctantly NHS and social care staff could legitimately and lawfully decline to put themselves in further danger and risk of injury at work."

She added that health secretary Matt Hancock "may have to consider his position" if the situation doesn't improve.

Unison head of health Sara Gorton said "staff in

high-risk areas may well decide that it's no longer safe for them to work".

If there are any walkouts over lack of equipment, unions must back them fully—not make equivocal statements.

Supporters of the People Before Profit—Worker Covid Activists Group are organising workplace actions on International Workers' Memorial Day.

They held a day of action on Thursday of last week to demand "PPE Now" and "Hancock must go".

Activists everywhere should use the unions' national call as an opportunity to organise workplace protests to rage at workers being sacrificed for profit.

●Go to People Before Profit—Health Worker Covid Activists on Facebook for details of local planning meetings and action on Tuesday 28 April

AS UNIONS CALL 'MINUTE'S SILENCE' NEXT TUESDAY... TIME TO PROTEST

by TOMÁŠ TENGYEL-EVANS

UNIONS ARE calling on people across Britain to hold a minute's silence for all health, care and other workers who have died of coronavirus.

Unison, the Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Midwives have organised the national minute's silence for 11am on Tuesday 28 April—International Workers' Memorial Day.

The Unite union has also called for a minute's silence at 12 noon.

Trade union leaders have been far too slow to organise resistance as the Tories and bosses gamble with workers' lives.

But activists must now use this call to mobilise class anger and build action.

Tory ministers praise "key workers"—and then tell lie after lie about the availability of testing and personal protective equipment.

There are even signs that the government is going to back the minute's silence—for deaths it has caused. We



HEALTH AND social care workers in Wigan last week organised a protest against the Tories' handling of the crisis

need to end the fakery of "national unity" and push for more struggle.

The death toll for health workers had reached 96 on Sunday night. One of those who died at the weekend

was healthcare assistant Jenelyn Carter who worked at Morriston Hospital in Swansea.

In an indication of how such workers are treated, Jenelyn's colleagues had

started a fundraising GoFundMe page for her when she was hospitalised.

This, they said, was because as a worker on a zero hours contract Jenelyn was not eligible for sick pay. Another

who died recently was Stewart. He worked as a paramedic for the North West Ambulance Service. His friend and colleague told Socialist Worker, "Stewart was self-isolating for two weeks and after four

days was admitted to hospital. I heard on Friday that he had died.

"At the moment paramedics are buying their own face masks. It's not just a lack of equipment, it's the quality.

"We have aprons that are flimsy and offer little protection—they are like a bin liner really."

The worker, who cleans and restocks ambulances, said the situation is "dire and getting worse".

"We normally put five packs of PPE onto an ambulance," he said.

"But we've only got enough for eight of the 24 ambulances at our station.

"When paramedics come into work, many are now searching around to find kit."

The unions' call for a minutes' silence is a sign of awareness of growing workers' frustration at having their lives constantly put at risk.

But their leaders fear Tory ministers would withdraw the union's invitation to be part of the national planning effort if they break ranks.

Some unions have even

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'Tories tell us there's enough kit, then say reuse it'

HEALTH WORKERS were told last weekend to reuse protective kit—even if it was labelled single use—as shortages became critical.

The Department of Health said "some compromise in process is needed" to cope with the crisis.

The advice came after public health officials drafted a document to suggest "last resort alternatives" to "acute supply shortages" of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

One nurse in south Essex—who has experienced shortages of protective kit—said the measures are "an insult to the lives of

frontline workers".

"Yet again it highlights this government's total lack of planning and demonstrates no regard for people they like to call 'heroes' at daily briefings," she told Socialist Worker.

"This is 2020, not 1820,

and our government is asking us to reuse PPE despite reassuring us that there is enough of it."

She added, "Research shows that the surgical masks are not effective—and now they even want us to reuse the

crap equipment."

Some NHS staff were already being forced to reuse kit before the change of advice. One health worker in South Yorkshire told Socialist Worker, "It's definitely bad advice and shocking to see in an official document.

"But it's something that's already happening in practice.

"I know of one home carer who had to visit eight people twice and has one uniform and one set of PPE. She had to go house to house with the same uniform and kit and then do a second round."

Years of Tory cuts and privatisation have left the NHS underprepared.



Health workers are being lied to about protective equipment

Health workers' action

HEALTH WORKERS and their supporters took part in a day of symbolic action to demand "health before profit" last week.

Supporters of the People Before Profit—Health Worker Covid Activists Group carried out small workplace actions and public stunts. In the biggest protest of the day, health and social care workers took a stand inside and outside Wigan council offices.

Dave, a Unison union rep, told Socialist Worker, "I turned up this morning at work and said to everybody, 'Are you up for it?' And the

vast majority agreed with the sentiment.

"We then went down to where the nursing staff are and we asked if they were up for it.

"We stood up in the middle of the floor the nurses are on, made a speech and got a few people out to protest."

The action in Wigan shows that it is still possible to organise workplace action while maintaining social distancing measures.

It's right for workers to protest at their workplaces to protect their health and lives—and those of the patients they want to treat.